LITERARY SYMBIOSIS

THE RECONFIGURED TEXT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY WRITING

DAVID COWART

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DAVID COWART

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For Pamela

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In the critics' vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors.

—Borges

And what if writing were precisely that which makes us reconsider our logic of the parasite?

—Derrida

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LITERARY SYMBIOSIS

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1 TRADITION, TALENT, AND "STOLENTELLING"

Oscar Wilde once remarked, "It is only the unimaginative who ever invents. The true artist is known by the use he makes of what he annexes, and he annexes everything."[1] Wilde's observation prefigures a famous dictum of T. S. Eliot's: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal."[2] The force of these epigrams derives from the assertion that the artist does not create ex nihilo: poems and stories contain previous poems and stories. For the most part one expects the artist to disguise these thefts or influences, to integrate them—to make them explicit only as allusion. But occasionally one encounters a special type of literary work that attaches itself remora-like to its source in seemingly parasitic dependence. Indeed, such attachments have become increasingly common in recent years, doubtless as part of the postmodernist tendency toward self-consciousness and self-reflexivity—the tendency to let the machinery show. A study of these "symbiotic" attachments, especially as they involve formal or thematic revision, will reveal something about how contemporary writers engage in a kind of "epistemic dialogue" with the past, meanwhile forcing readers into a recognition of the historical or diachronic differences between the voice of one literary age and that of another. At the same time, it will reveal something about how these writers deal with the bête noire of every new literary generation: the dread that the precursors have told all the stories, exhausted the genres, "used up" the very language available for artistic creation.

Though my focus in what follows will be on contemporary works, I shall also consider the occasional exploitation of preexistent texts by modernist or premodernist authors, for my subject asks exploration in terms of

history as well as linguistic theory, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics. As will be seen, however, literary symbiosis is a largely contemporary phenomenon, heir in some sense to the modernists' propensity for extensive allusion. Though it falls squarely into an interesting area of theoretical speculation, the specific subject of literary symbiosis has not generated its own critical agenda. Yet it concerns basic questions of the relation between the individual talent and the tradition, questions of influence and the anxiety of influence, questions of intertextuality, and questions of closure as contrasted with the resistance to closure that some theorists see as a fundamental quality of literature.

Literary symbiosis involves a certain bracing candor. One thinks of it as "influence" in its most straightforward manifestation. Thus it counters the occasional notion in popular criticism that literary indebtedness is some kind of embarrassment to artists, something they do not want recognized. To be sure, artists often seem to bridle, in interviews, at questions about influence, and from Edgar Allan Poe to D. M. Thomas they have necessarily been mindful of the obloquy attaching to mere imitation or plagiarism. But in their more candid moments—witness the remarks of Wilde and Eliot, cited above—they admit that annexation or borrowing or outright theft has always been the norm among those recognizing "originality" as the romantic and bourgeois shibboleth that it is.[3]

Artists as disparate as Zora Neale Hurston and James Joyce have commented on this shibboleth. Hurston, exercised by the characterization of African American writing as derivative or imitative, observes in Nancy Cunard's anthology *Negro:*

> It is obvious that to get back to original sources is much too difficult for any group to claim very much as a certainty. What we really mean by originality is the modification of ideas. The most ardent admirer of Shakespeare cannot claim first source even for him. It is his treatment of the borrowed material.[4]

Joyce goes beyond Hurston's word *borrowed.* In *Finnegans Wake,* the unimaginative Shaun disparages a piece of writing by his brother Shem, type of the creative artist: "Every dimmed letter in it is a copy and not a few of the silbils and wholly words. . . . The last word in stolentelling!"[5] Since "to tell" means to count as well as to narrate, Shaun manages to imply that Shem's practice amounts to little less than till robbing. But Joyce understands what Shaun does not: that storytelling always involves theft, that all "telling" is "stolen." In this universal principle of artistic larceny, Joyce defines the dynamics of intertextuality.

The present study applies the insight Joyce shares with Wilde, Eliot, and others to the especially frank appropriations of literary symbiosis. Thus in this first chapter I undertake a three-part prolegomenon to the analysis of selected symbiotic texts in the chapters that follow. In the first part I describe and attempt to define literary symbiosis, noting its manifold types but coming to focus on those examples that strike me as most innovative and problematic. With the field somewhat narrowed, I move in the second part to a consideration of how theorists of what John Barth calls the literature of exhaustion discuss and defend literary strategies of renewal that anticipate those of symbiosis proper. The last part of the chapter introduces ways to understand contemporary symbiotic texts: as epistemic dialogue with ages producing parent texts, as authorial psychomachia, and, most importantly, as reading, misreading, and deconstruction of the literary past. Here and throughout this book I argue that symbiosis is an important instrument of postmodern aesthetics, a brilliantly effective strategy not only for transforming the monuments of literary history but also for "making it new" in an age that, notwithstanding its pose of superiority, remains troubled by the myth of originality. What literary symbiosis makes new, of course, is literature itself.

The Symbiotic Spectrum

Among the handful of critics who have addressed the subject of symbiosis in any substantive way is Gérard Genette, author of *Palimpsestes*. Discriminating among various types of "transtextual" writing, Genette speaks of "intertexts" (like Kristeva and Barthes, he refers by this term to the way linguistic usage—in literature or otherwise—constantly echoes prior linguistic usage), "paratexts" (titles, notes, epigraphs, forewords, afterwords, and so on), "metatexts" (criticism), and, most importantly, "hypertexts," which subsume "all relations uniting a text B . . . to a prior text A."[6] Although Genette surveys such relations quite extensively, I find that my own study of symbiosis does not, in general, reinvent his theoretical wheel. Genette focuses chiefly on exhaustive discrimination and taxonomy, and the implications of the particular transtextual relations that I call symbiosis receive little attention. I look at symbiosis with an eye to seeing how "a text B" *means* in relation to the "prior text A." I am interested, too, in symbiosis as a specifically postmodern phenomenon, one in which, at times, meaning in the prior text is affected by its hypertext.

Symbiosis, like its poor relation "influence," is a shape-shifter, a Proteus, and the critical Menelaus who would pin it down, force it to yield

its secrets, only begins by exhausting the resources of definition. To argue, further, its validity and importance as a means of literary continuity, such a Menelaus might build his case by (1) showing just how widespread the practice in question is and (2) countering the argument that the symbiotic text is a mere parasite on the body of some more legitimate and original text. No doubt he will find as he proceeds the need to take into consideration his own vestigial assumptions about originality.

He will also find, as Derrida says, that "writing"—his term for all structures of signification, all semiotic difference—"makes us reconsider our logic of the parasite."[7] Derrida makes this point in the course of an analysis of the philosophical tradition (going back to Plato's *Phaedrus*) that makes speech natural, writing its parasite—that which unnaturally "supplements" it. Derrida revises the very definition of writing in such a way as to reveal its conceptual anteriority to speech. As "engraving, which copies the models of art, is nonetheless the model for art,"[8] so speech was "always already" a writing blind to itself. A neat reversal: parasite becomes host.

Perhaps one can call the postmodernist symbiont parasitical to the extent that it subverts myth or exposes the ideology behind the language of the precursor text. Parasitism, however, is only one form of symbiosis, and a more thorough consideration of the biological parallels will yield a terminology better suited to discrimination and less fundamentally pejorative. Like biological parasitism, which subsumes mistletoe as well as the noxious tapeworm, literary parasitism has its own considerable range. From the blind mouths of parody to the aesthetic hybrids encountered in recent poetry, drama, and fiction, literary parasitism reveals a diversity that should forestall the ill repute usually attaching to dependency.

Dependency, after all, can be mutual; and indeed the term symbiosis, among biologists, refers to three types of interdependent relations among organisms, including commensalism and mutualism as well as parasitism. In a commensalist relationship, only the guest organism benefits, but the host suffers no harm. In a mutualistic relationship, both host and guest benefit. In a parasitic relationship, the guest benefits at the expense of the host. All of these terms, by the way, have their literary counterparts, but I propose to make selective use of them. For example, the types of biological symbiosis—commensalism, mutualism, and parasitism—will be found to exhaust their usefulness to literary analogy in the present chapter, where they will serve to introduce, define, and differentiate the specialized intertextuality here examined. The terms "host" and "guest," on the other hand, will prove useful throughout the study. Thus I will make "guest text" (Genette's hypertext) standard for the work based on a previous work,

"host text" (Genette's hypotext) standard for its symbiont. The author of a host text will be, after Bloom, a "precursor" or, occasionally and less elegantly, the "host author." Since Bloom's "ephebe" implies a male author, it will generally have to give way to "guest author" or "latecomer."

As for literary analogues to the three types of biological symbiosis, readers most often encounter forms of commensalism, in which the host text neither gains nor loses by the guest's attachment. Most translations from one genre to another (from book to movie, for example) fall into this category. Literary mutualism, in which both host and guest seem to gain (in meaning or significance), proves less common but considerably more interesting. Stevie Smith's "Thoughts About the Person from Porlock," for example, obviously derives much resonance from its double host, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and the note traditionally appended to it. The benefit, however, is mutual, for one's grasp of the real subject of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge's creative anxieties, is in turn much enhanced by the Smith poem. The guest that actually damages its host, finally, is surprisingly rare—except in a kind of metaphorical sense unsanctioned by the biological analogue, for one inevitably thinks of the genuinely uninspired, unoriginal symbiont as a parasite, regardless of whether or not it actually harms its host.

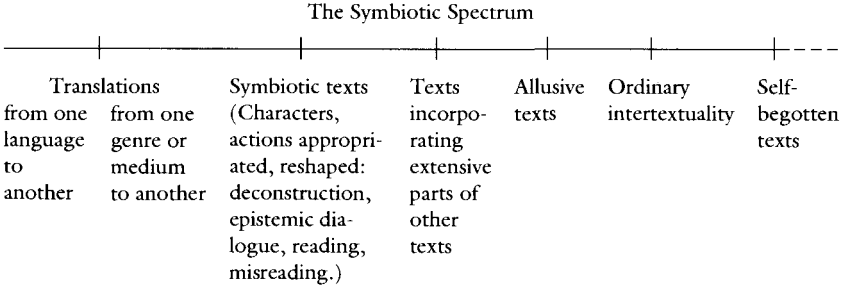
The most common form of literary parasitism would probably be parody, but even here one must judge cautiously. As Patrick Scott has pointed out, the word *parody,* which derives from "Latin *parodia,* Greek *paroidia,* holds the literal sense of singing, not after or about another song, but alongside it, in a parallel relationship, so marginalizing a text that once was central."[9] Yet the target of parody seldom, in fact, suffers damage, and for that matter not every parodist intends disparagement. Some parody reveals affection rather than scorn, and, as will be seen, much postmodernist symbiosis depends on nontendentious forms of parody that involve no diminution of host texts. In parody, which Alan Wilde acutely characterizes as "arguably the most overt form of intertextual encounter,"[10] much depends on what Linda Hutcheon calls the "critical distance" maintained between parodic text and text parodied.[11] For Bakhtin, parody is the indispensable adjunct to literary discourse, the necessary "critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word." Bakhtin, too, notes that parody need not disparage—it only reasserts the irreducible multiplicity of life, of a "reality . . . always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre."[12]

To the extent that actual disparagement of the host figures, parody would seem frankly parasitical, dependent as it is on the continued health of the

host for its own continued existence, yet promoting the host's demise. Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* generates interest only as footnote to a problematic apprenticeship to Sherwood Anderson, whose work it mocks. Virtually no one would read *Shamela* in isolation, without some knowledge of *Pamela*. Yet one requires no such knowledge to read *Joseph Andrews,* which transcends its parodic beginnings to achieve an autonomy qualified only slightly by its ultimately symbiotic attachment to a previous text and its characters. By the same token, Hecht's "The Dover Bitch" does not seem grounded in hostility toward or contempt for the Matthew Arnold poem that gives it life. It seems less parasite than commensalist symbiont.

Probably the Hecht poem would not continue to be read if the Arnold poem dropped out of sight. As Tynjanov points out, "Parody is viable only in so far as what is being parodied is still alive."[13] But some symbionts, even parasites, paradoxically enough, completely displace their hosts and achieve an autonomy that translates them from the realm of symbiosis, as a parasitical larva eventually becomes an autonomous butterfly. Of course, time seldom validates the occasional perception that some popular guest text has actually supplanted its host. Only the most naive of moviegoers would think Walter Hill's film *The Warriors,* which concerns the struggle of a street gang to return from hostile to friendly territory, ultimately more satisfying and true to its subject than Xenophon's *The Anabasis,* on which it is based. But the finest guest texts can and do overwhelm their hosts, as happens routinely between Shakespeare or Chaucer and their sources.

A fresh analogy may prove useful to the ultimate goal of arguing the importance of symbiosis to the literary artist's prospects for coming to terms with the past and its daunting monuments. One ought for purposes of discrimination to differentiate symbiosis from its intertextual cousins, and to this end one can think of it as occupying one of the central bands of a spectrum of literary relationships, a spectrum with the work of translators at one end and completely sui generis or autonomous texts (not that such things actually exist) at the other. Consider the following diagram:


The Symbiotic Spectrum
Translations from one language to another
from one genre or medium to another
Symbiotic texts (Characters, actions appropriated, reshaped: deconstruction, epistemic dialogue, reading, misreading.)
Texts incorporating extensive parts of other texts
Allusive texts
Ordinary intertextuality
Self-begotten texts

I have placed the mythical autonomous texts in off-the-chart limbo to the right. To their left, at the end of the diagram proper, are texts of routine intertextuality. Here the "weave" implied etymologically in the word *text* requires a fine Barthesian instrument to be seen. From the intertextual band one moves farther toward the center of the spectrum with works involving more and more self-conscious allusion. The midrange hues of near-symbiosis (and occasional charges of plagiarism) come into view with texts involving the appropriation of more and larger chunks of prior literary works—the kind of thing one sees in John Gardner's "The King's Indian" (1974), which incorporates lengthy passages from Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and other texts, or in D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), which incorporates considerable amounts of Anatoly Kuznetsov's 1967 documentary novel *Babi Yar* (itself incorporating the firsthand testimony of Dina Pronicheva and others who witnessed the Nazi occupation of the Ukraine in 1942). But beyond these works, at left center of the spectrum, lies symbiosis proper. Here symbiotic candor forestalls charges of plagiarism: one imagines a *White Hotel* entirely about Kiev in the war years and based directly on the Kuznetsov book, or a retelling of *Pym* from the point of view of Pym's companion, Augustus Barnard. In fact, there is a completion of *Pym* by Jules Verne, and Poe himself makes *The Thousand Nights and a Night* the host text for his "Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade," a double symbiont that continues the tale of Sinbad at the same time that it concludes—predictably—the frame story of Scheherazade and Shahriyar (Poe cannot pass up the opportunity to add one more inflection to the grammar of death and the beautiful woman).

One can perform a complementary analysis—and reach symbiosis more quickly—from the other end of the spectrum. At the far left is a category almost as mythical as the self-begotten text: the "simple" linguistic translation from one language to another. In fact translation, like signification itself, is never wholly transparent. Translation involves considerable creativity, and the work of the translator is often copyrightable. Next on the spectrum come other kinds of "translations," as from genre to genre or medium to medium. Some of these qualify as true symbiosis in that they involve substantive thematic and formal change. Others remain little removed, aesthetically or thematically, from the simpler forms of linguistic translation. Still others become independent swiftly and do not encourage comparison on the part of a reader or audience. One includes here adaptations from book to opera (*La Bohème*), from play to opera (*Tosca, Beatrice and Benedict*), from book to film (*The Name of the Rose*), from film to book (various "novelizations"), from stage to film (*Amadeus*), from chi-

valric romance to novel to musical to film (*Le Morte Darthur / The Once and Future King / Camelot*), and, finally, from fairy tale or poem to ballet (*The Nutcracker*, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*). Some works—*Romeo and Juliet,* for example—naturally go through a more or less comprehensive generic filiation, from the Shakespeare play to the Tchaikovsky tone poem to the opera by Gounod to the dramatic symphony by Berlioz to the ballet by Prokofiev to the musical by Bernstein to the film by Zeffirelli, rather like the popular culture declension chronicled a few years back by a satirical magazine: from book to paperback to movie to comic book to theme toys to T-shirts to board games to bubblegum cards to party napkins.

The generic translation—book to movie being the most familiar—often turns high culture into popular culture. Such translations seldom achieve the more interesting forms of symbiosis. Admittedly, films made from mediocre books—certain *film noir* classics, for example—sometimes achieve a distinction not found in their Ur-texts. Sometimes, too, they reveal something substantive about the original that had been missed. Americans dismissed Jim Thompson until Bertrand Tavernier (the French admire Thompson) made the film *Coup de Torchon* from one of his novels (more recently, the film of his novel *The Grifters* has led to renewed interest in his work). Occasionally, too, a small good book like Davis Grubb's *Night of the Hunter* becomes a small good movie like Charles Laughton's film of the same title. But films based on serious books seldom improve on their originals (the exception might be Antonioni's *Blow-Up,* based on a story by Cortázar). Hollywood is notorious for the happy ending and other methods of pithing the many respectable and even great fictions it adapts. When Miss Lonelyhearts marries Betty in the Hollywood version of Nathanael West's dark novel, a vulgar myth of fulfillment ruins a grimly comic—and brilliant—morality play. The same monstrous alteration figures in Hollywood's adaptation of *The Sound and the Fury,* in which Jason marries Quentin. The film of *Dr. Zhivago,* by the same token, does not compare with Pasternak's novel, nor does the science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet,* though clever, compare with its symbiont, Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* However well received, such guests seldom approach the excellence of their hosts; they prove short on real refinement of aesthetic means or thematic ends.

The guests in such instances are best classified as examples of literary parasitism or the lesser forms of literary commensalism. Many, in fact, are merely versions of the same story, siblings rather than symbionts, superficially differentiated and likely to go their separate ways, *Candide* designating now a fiction by Voltaire, now a musical by Bernstein. Only occasion-

ally do such versions modify or impinge on each other; only occasionally does one version revise its predecessor in any substantive way. As T. S. Eliot points out, when Shakespeare's Hamlet becomes much younger, in Laforgue's version of the play, the play changes significantly.[14] Without such rethinking, the literary relationship is that of an inconsequential one-way dependency, so that symbiosis becomes so attenuated as not to register on our critical instruments. For the most part, such routine congeners—exhaustively catalogued in Genette's *Palimpsestes*[15]—will receive little attention here, the better to concentrate on the more sophisticated forms of literary commensalism and mutualism.

The important consideration, at least for one interested in the genuinely problematic examples of literary symbiosis, would seem to lie in whether or not the "guest" invites a comparison with the "host." Does the guest text, that is, manage to cast a new light on the original—the way Eliot says that the individual talent at once inherits and *modifies* the tradition? By this "new light" I do not refer to what takes place when Broadway, say, appropriating a play by Shakespeare or Plautus, revamps classical material for a popular audience. One looks for a more comprehensive statement about culture in the interaction of the original's theme or aesthetic and the theme or aesthetic of the guest text. Without this element, readers encounter only a supremely bland type of mutualism, especially visible in series fictions and films (e.g., the Tarzan or James Bond books and movies), which feature a common character or characters and a formulaic plot that differs only superficially from installment to installment. The works within a series seldom enhance or modify each other.

But serious authors also produce sequels and series, as when Alexandre Dumas *père* returns to his famous musketeers in *Twenty Years After* or Joyce continues the experiences of Stephen Dedalus from *A Portrait of the Artist* to *Ulysses*. Other writers go considerably further. John Updike has produced a number of such symbionts, from the Bech books and the four novels centering on Rabbit Angstrom to his trilogy recasting *The Scarlet Letter* (*A Month of Sundays, Roger's Version,* and *S.*). One can also count here Philip Roth's Zuckerman novels or John Le Carré's Smiley novels.

In his book *Postmodernist Fiction* Brian McHale glances at works of this type and emphasizes what, following Umberto Eco, he calls the "trans-world identity" of their characters. Citing as "paradigmatic examples . . . Balzac's *Comédie humaine* and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels," he goes on to consider the postmodernist mileage, in books by Robbe-Grillet and John Barth, to be gotten out of this "transmigration of characters from

one fictional universe to another." In a traditional writer like Balzac, he remarks, "the device of *retour de personnages* actually *buttresses* realism," but in the overdetermined and parodic practice of postmodernists like Robbe-Grillet or Barth it "begins to have the opposite effect, destabilizing rather than consolidating fictional ontology." The example of Barth's LETTERS (1979) is particularly instructive. Here the author "has written the collective sequel to *all six* of his previous novels, from *The Floating Opera* (1956) through *Chimera* (1972), reviving from each of them its major characters and reintegrating them in a new fictional world." The effect, says McHale, is "to foreground the intertextual dimension."[16]

Perhaps such auto-symbiosis is the ideal, for the self-generated symbionts cited above illustrate a basic feature of mutualistic texts: they interact thematically. The distaste one may feel for the decadent plantation aristocrats of one Faulkner novel is tempered when one encounters, in another Faulkner novel, their ratlike carpetbagger inheritors. *Ulysses* fulfills, as it were, the hints in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that Joyce is satirically distancing himself from his autobiographical character Stephen Dedalus. The family romance in Joyce's first novel, invested in the myth of the fabulous artificer, is humanized in the Telemachiad of the second.

But this kind of mutualism, though intriguing, is less problematic than that of texts produced by different authors with more radically different—or at least more enterprisingly complementary—thematic interests. Such mutualism, of course, presents the analyst with difficulties—for example, in defining just how the host text benefits from its relationship with the guest. Classics, however, benefit simply by being brought once again before the consciousness of readers, and classics must be reinterpreted for every age, as the Romantics demonstrated memorably in their iconoclastic reading of *Paradise Lost,* that symbiont of Genesis. Symbiosis can be the expression of this need to reinterpret, and postmodernist symbiosis is in some sense the fulfillment of the promise implicit in the way the Blakean or Byronic hero—or Mary Shelley's sympathetic monster—seems retroactively to reshape the Miltonic antagonist. Certainly among the texts presenting themselves as candidates for symbiosis one sees many that seem strongly at odds, philosophically or ideologically, with the present; thus the novel of nineteenth-century husband-hunting acquires a feminist symbiont, the work of epic heroism spawns a "moral fiction" meditating the anguish of contemporary futility, and the drama of tragic suffering and revenge is turned inside out to become a work of "post-absurdist" comedy.

Symbiosis and the Postmodern Aesthetic

"These days," according to Judith Grossman, "veterans and beginners in fiction alike rummage busily in what Woolf called the great bran pie of literature for good stuff cheap."[17] Another observer, David Leon Higdon, notes that British novelists after the second world war have become increasingly interested in and absorbed by the past. In addition to novels of personal retrospection and novels whose heroes are professionally involved with the past (archeologists, scholars, historians), Higdon notes the prominence of "fiction imitating past fiction in a very self-conscious manner." The authors of this kind of work "have engaged in a dialogue with earlier fiction, thus complementing and often completing its silences. Finally they have rebelled against the assumptions and techniques of earlier writers and parodied them. In each instance, however, the newly created works stand inextricably tied to the earlier works." Higdon cites some pronouncements by Robbe-Grillet, David Lodge, Susan Sontag, and others to suggest that this kind of thing can tend to be little more than a confession of cultural bankruptcy and decadence. But he affirms that a number of parodic or symbiotic fictions—among them Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* George MacDonald Fraser's Royal Flash novels, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* and Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound*—manage at once to sustain "valuable links with the past" and to achieve imaginative autonomy.[18]

The artist who plainly—even ostentatiously—bases a new literary work on preexistent material might seem to risk being thought unoriginal, a mere epigone. Indeed, the witty narrator of *Flaubert's Parrot,* by Julian Barnes, complains about literary symbiosis on precisely this score:

> There shall be no more novels which are really about other novels. No "modern versions," reworkings, sequels or prequels. No imaginative completions of works left unfinished on their author's death. Instead, every writer is to be issued with a sampler in coloured wools to hang over the fireplace. It reads: Knit Your Own Stuff.[19]

But this only demonstrates how widespread literary symbiosis is, and one doubts that the narrator actually speaks for Barnes—whose novel about the life and works of Flaubert, after all, involves the ironic exploitation not just of a single text but of a whole oeuvre. Among examples of literary symbiosis, moreover, one encounters few artistic failures, few of what Borges calls "those parasitic books which situate Christ on a boulevard, Hamlet on La Cannebière or Don Quixote on Wall Street."[20] In fact, one commonly encounters works of great cleverness—works like the twenty-third of Words-

worth's *Miscellaneous Sonnets,* which revises Sir Philip Sidney's "With How Sad Steps, O Moon, Thou Climbst the Skies," or Philip Larkin's "Sad Steps," which is symbiotically attached to both Wordsworth and Sidney. The theater, too, provides examples, notably in the plays of Brecht and of Tom Stoppard, who might be called the prince of symbiotic letters. But the largest number of examples comes from fiction, where readers meet with such works as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), based on *Jane Eyre;* John Seelye's *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1970), based on the Mark Twain classic; Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* (1982), based on Pound's Mauberley poems; and the numerous symbionts of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* One also encounters able continuations of familiar and less familiar novels by Richardson, Fielding, Dickens, Mary Shelley, Hawthorne, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The nonliterary arts, especially painting and music, offer other examples of symbiosis. But whether artistic, musical, or literary, symbiosis has little to do with classical ideas of nurturing originality and mastery through imitation—the doctrines given literary expression by Longinus in *On the Sublime* and by Ben Jonson in *Timber.* Imitation of a precursor can still signal some kind of maturational passage, but it is more likely, in the age of Nabokov, Barth, Pynchon, Calvino, and Borges, to announce a bold and highly original form of creative endeavor. The term "imitation," however, misleads, for the textual simulacra produced by these authors allow them to engage in artful dialogue with—and often parody or subversion of—the aesthetic and philosophical assumptions of their precursors. Symbiosis, in other words, naturally furthers the ends of contemporary writing. The postmodernist text, which tends to call attention to its own artifice, is often self-referential or self-parodic: it is its own parasite. Its symbiotic attachment to another text is a typically postmodern convolution of self-referential meaning. A further convolution, a further disorientation of the reader, occurs in works like *Pale Fire* (1962), by Nabokov, or *Freddy's Book* (1980), by John Gardner, in which the self-referential text contains its own *internal* symbiont.

Such self-symbionts suggest that the device of narrative and frame may be a symbiotic paradigm. Which suggests further that the phenomenon of embedding—especially ekphrasis, the embedding of one work of art in another—is properly viewed as symbiosis or its cousin-german. Such, at any rate, will be one of the premises of a later chapter, on *Pale Fire.* More broadly, however, the thrust of this entire study will be to reveal in explicit symbiosis a number of features common to all literature, and thereby to

suggest that what at first seems an anomaly is ultimately something at the heart of the matter.

In the proliferation of symbionts one descries attempts to deal with one of the great crises of modern letters, the crisis that Walter Jackson Bate addresses in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970) and John Barth in his controversial 1968 essay "The Literature of Exhaustion." Put simply, this crisis is that of the literary artist who despairs of saying anything that has not already been said—or, for that matter, of saying it in a new way. Both Bate and Barth wrestle with the nagging fear that in fact the latter days of literature are at hand. Bate worries "that the arts could, over the long range, be considered as by definition suicidal: that, given the massive achievement in the past, they may have no further way to proceed except toward progressive refinement, nuance, indirection, and finally, through the continued pressure for difference, into the various forms of anti-art." Bate ponders whether the latecomer is doomed, in Dryden's image, to produce at best "the second temple," the inferior successor to Solomon's temple in the Bible.[21] Barth, on the other hand, takes a more sanguine view, and in the flowering of symbiosis one sees the validation of his credentials as prophet. In "The Literature of Exhaustion" he meditates like Bate on a perception of the "used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" but devotes himself optimistically to the character of the art that mocks its own exhaustion, noting with approbation how a contemporary writer like Borges "confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work." Barth remarks that his own work—*Giles Goat-Boy,* for example, or *The Sot-Weed Factor*—includes "novels which imitate the form of the Novel," and he refers to himself as "an author who imitates the role of Author."[22] The resources of parodic replication, in other words, not to mention irony and self-reflexivity, enable the contemporary literary artist to make it new.

The theoretical writings of Italian critic Renato Barilli extend these ideas. Barilli posits a poetics of *riscrittura,* or rewriting, which he defines as "narrative based on 'topoi' already made famous by previous authors." The "existing stories" are "reformulated in a different narrative register, and transformed during a process of 'rewriting.' "[23] If the host foregrounds one narrative element, like plot, the guest marginalizes it and foregrounds a different narrative element. Barth supplies an apposite remark here: "If this sort of thing sounds unpleasantly decadent, nevertheless it's about where the genre began, with *Quixote* imitating *Amadis of Gaul,* Cervantes pretending to be the Cid Hamete Benengeli (and Alonso Quijano pretending

to be Don Quixote), or Fielding parodying Richardson."[24] Like a Barth or Borges, Barilli sees replication as a necessity that can become a virtue. In a chapter on Calvino and Arbasino in his *Tra presenza e assenza* (1974), he remarks that "nought remains" for the contemporary writer but "decisively to face again . . . the 'already said' and 'already done,' to challenge the past, the museum, the great deposits of codified forms or stereotypes." He makes the point memorable in a sentence that seems to embody the circularity it describes: "On the whole it can be said of a poetics of rewriting that it is precisely the recognition that there is no more space to consume, that progress (literally, going forward) is not, then, as infinite as once was thought; space-time is, almost in an Einsteinian sense, curved, and at a certain moment nothing remains but to revisit the 'places' already traversed: a revisiting that, in terms of a narrative operation, is obviously a rewriting." But unlike Barth or the Borges of "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" (about which more in part three of this chapter), Barilli admits that acceptance of the new aesthetic requires "a strong stomach for paradoxes, given that the literary newness in question is (re)found in a posture that at first presents itself as its own negation."[25]

Thus Barilli gets credit for being that rarity, a critic who has looked squarely at symbiosis as technique. Unfortunately, he does not take his discovery very far, and in fact tends not to go beyond observations about purely generic versions of symbiosis. In the "*nouveau nouveau roman*" exemplified by Robbe-Grillet, for example, "characters were constantly being subverted by a distanced narrator who delighted in continuously unsettling and thwarting the reader's expectations." Robbe-Grillet himself echoes detective or pornographic genres more than he appropriates the actual plot or character of any particular host author.[26] The Calvino of *Invisible Cities,* by the same token, proves vaguely to be recasting the Marco Polo story, *Il Milione.*

More apropos is the Barth of "The Literature of Replenishment," published a decade after "Exhaustion." Here Barth presents a somewhat heteroclite program for postmodernism, which he construes as properly—in the works, for example, of Calvino and García Márquez—some kind of synthesis between the iconoclastic and corrective tendencies of modernism and the humanity, experiential grounding, and broader accessibility of premodernism. "The ideal postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and 'contentism,' pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction."[27] Although I am not at all sure (and neither is Barth) that this rises above the prescriptive to approach the descriptive, he is right that a postmodernist aesthetic

has emerged that seems already fully consolidated, no longer "experimental"—and that it is, to use Barilli's term, a "rewriting."

The sociologist Todd Gitlin, on the other hand, favors the old-fashioned and dyslogistic term "pastiche" to characterize—too broadly—the body of literature that includes symbiosis. "Pastiche," he argues, "lives off borrowed energies. The post-modern mode is compilation, recombination. . . . Pastiche writing tends to become a scrapbook, a compendium of antimoralism that shrieks moralistically, Look at me! and Who cares? When writing is imprisoned within previous writing, it can't attend to what hasn't been written, what hasn't yet been imagined. Numb, recombinant fiction therefore fails to bring the real news of subsurface feeling, sense and sensibility. Nor can it be a criticism of life."[28] Oddly, Gitlin adduces only Bret Easton Ellis, Joan Didion, and Denis Johnson as examples of what he is talking about, which turns out to be the pose of an ahistorical outlook more than the incidental recombining or hybridization of texts. But after what Thomas McFarland calls "the accelerating increase of the cultural past,"[29] after decades of concern about the "burden" of that past vis-à-vis contemporary "exhaustion," it seems naive simply to urge a pious veneration of "what hasn't been written, what hasn't yet been imagined." The point is that what has yet to be written was always already written, both literally and grammatologically. All writing is "imprisoned within previous writing," and these insights are part of symbiotic meaning.

Reading, Misreading, Signifyin(g), Epistemic Dialogue, and Deconstruction

I have been arguing that in symbiosis contemporary writing finds a means to make the old new simply by rewriting it. I have argued, too, that this strategy amounts to more than a parlor game, more than a shallow paradox. At this point I should like to look briefly at some of the ways in which symbiosis means. Inevitably, whether the guest author appropriates a character from the host text, extrapolates from its action, or even replicates it word for word, meaning does not remain stable. It shifts toward the ironic or deconstructive, whether at its own expense or that of the host text, or it becomes selective reading, misreading, or *méconnaisance*.

Though I am chiefly concerned here with the especially candid literary relationships that I have called symbiotic, I should like to glance briefly at the overdetermined intertextuality or "Signifyin(g)" that, according to Henry Louis Gates, always figures in African American writing. Adopting

a term from the vernacular, Gates argues that texts within the African-American tradition "Signify upon" prior texts from that tradition—that is, their authors produce what Gates, citing Bakhtin, calls "double-voiced" parodic or pastiche texts that repeat or ironically revise prior texts. "When one text Signifies upon another text, by tropological revision or repetition and difference, the double-voiced utterance allows us to chart discrete formal relationships in Afro-American literary history. Signifyin(g), then, is a metaphor for textual revision."[30]

Gates argues, too, that Signifyin(g) need not be limited to African American texts, for "all texts Signify upon other texts."[31] But a declaration like this robs the concept of what distinguishes it from the extremely broad idea of intertextuality. Signifyin(g), in fact, however self-conscious, tends generally to prove more generalized and broadly parodic than the direct and specific appropriations of symbiosis proper. Moreover, what makes for double-voicedness in one intertextual realm makes for something more "dialogic" (to continue the Bakhtinian terminology for a moment) in the franker sphere of symbiosis. In other words, in symbiosis, a textual dialogue is joined, and the less temporally proximate the texts, the more interesting the conversation.

Thus John Gardner, in *Grendel* (1971), can show his readers something of the remote reality of a fifth-century Nordic culture at the same time that he contrasts that culture, with its sense of purpose and faith in the heroic ideal, with the effete present-day ethos, for which the nihilistic Grendel is, alas, a plausible spokesman. One sees with special clarity in this example that the host text is also always the potentially disruptive guest within the guest. Such disruption, however, can be quite welcome. Indeed, by making his narrator, Grendel, classically unreliable, Gardner ingeniously allows the Ur-text, *Beowulf*, to vex its symbiont as much from within as from its earlier vantage in literary history. Like other postmodernist writers, Gardner produces a self-referential fiction that reflects the way our language and our myths shape us. A Stoppard or a Barth produces such works with what seems to me the usual postmodernist intention of undermining naive assumptions about language or myth. Gardner, however, resists what he perceives as the nihilistic tendencies of contemporary literature. Striving to write "moral fiction," he attempts to embrace postmodernist aesthetics without sacrificing what Derrida would call an ultimate "metaphysics of presence." As will be seen in chapter 9, he contrives to make his fiction do self-consciously what its distant model did unself-consciously—to promote a myth of heroic purpose that the modern world will find redemptive.

Routinely, then, the guest author makes, among other things, a state-

ment about the modern temper as contrasted to the spirit of the age that produced whatever work is being refitted. In doing so, such an author brings to postmodernism certain traits of the modernism that preceded it. The John Gardner who "reinscribes" a classic text renews our interest in that text. In an age of widespread cultural illiteracy, the literary monuments of the past require continual revitalization; thus a number of contemporary authors seem to be carrying on, with fresh urgency, the cultural reclamation projects of modernist writers like Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and, in her different way, Cather.

Though Gardner is working on a relatively modest scale, he also encourages reflection on the meaning of epic symbiosis—symbiosis that becomes more consequential when the guest is on the same scale as the host. Epic defines a national or cultural ethos, and the epic symbiont—Joyce's *Ulysses,* for example—must stand up to the expectation that it, too, will have some such large-scale significance or meaning. The meaning can be positive or negative, depending on the guest author's perspective. Joyce characterizes his culture (at once his native Ireland and the West) as the mere parodic simulacrum of an heroic paradigm. This in contrast to Virgil, who, in appropriating a minor non-Greek character from the *Iliad* and spinning out his own epic, defines a powerful new geopolitical reality: the displacement of the Hellenic culture by Rome—founded by Aeneas—as center of Mediterranean civilization.

The Homeric host also accommodates Nobel laureate Derek Walcott's long narrative poem *Omeros* (1990). More intertextual and allusive, perhaps, than symbiotic, this poem compels our attention by enacting an extraordinary dialogue between, on the one hand, the imagination and language of its contemporary Caribbean author and, on the other, the Homeric texts he invokes and echoes. Walcott sets the action of *Omeros* on his native St. Lucia. What better place to reimagine the sightless bard of antiquity than an island named for the patron saint of the blind? Walcott's narrator, himself a Telemachus, has learned from a Greek lover to call the host author by his original name, Omeros, and he conjures this mythic figure both in his ancient form and in the guise of the old blind fisherman and singer Seven Seas.

Like the original Omeros, Walcott sings in flowing hexameters; like Homer, too, he celebrates a Helen, freshly incarnated here as a Caribbean beauty who works for a pig breeder, a retired British sergeant major. Circe-like, she threatens to turn this "khaki Ulysses"[32] into one of his own swine. But the real candidates for Helen's attention are the fishermen Achille, who shares a boat with the badly injured Philoctete, and Hector, who trades

his boat for a passenger van. Rivals at love, Achille and Hector are also at odds in that the one, repudiating an ancient way of life for the dubious gratification of being a taxi driver, immerses himself in contemporaneity, while the other yearns to recover the remote African past of his slave ancestor, Afolabe. Achille and Hector represent two sides of the West Indian social reality, and the author explicitly links their Helen to the land itself, the fabulously beautiful island torn between cultural alternatives of tradition and modernity.

Walcott also emulates Homer in the rendering of a specific people's cultural identity within a context of "many nations": his Homeric conceit allows him to weave in allusions to the historical struggles of Dutch, French, English, and aboriginal Caribs over St. Lucia and its neighbors, not to mention the fate of native Americans and forcibly relocated Africans elsewhere in the hemisphere. Thus he devotes sections of the poem to the suffering of those displaced by the westward expansion of white people in North America, along with meditations on the strange Greekness—in its architecture, in the ridiculous names of its slaves—of the American south. This larger historical and cultural context notwithstanding, Walcott remains focused on the awful heritage of the innumerable West Indians descended from slaves. Despite his interest in and admiration for Homer, Walcott remains troubled that the slaveholding society of ancient Greece could produce such powerful and lasting art. He encourages the reader to see that his islanders ultimately owe their heroic appellations to a practice of their ancestors' owners, who amused themselves by conferring outlandish classical names on their chattel. Thus one of the nominally Homeric figures, Philoctete, associates "the stench from manacled ankles, the coffled feet" (p. 15), with his wound and its sickening smell: "He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Why else was there no cure?" (p. 19).

Through the teasing and highly oblique parallels he constructs between his Caribbean world and the Mediterranean world of Homer, Walcott compels the reader to see the timelessness of the human drama in the West Indies. If he seeks in the classical parallels to confer significance on his humble West Indian characters, he is no more to be reproached for doing so than is the Joyce he salutes as "our age's Omeros" (p. 200), the Joyce who also borrowed a Homeric mantle to enliven his account of another island, another cultural backwater. Without diminishing the author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey,* moreover, Walcott forces a recognition of how fresh and tentative Homer's theme once was, at the dawn of the civilization that

would make itself as available to the West Indies and its artists as to the once-parvenu cultures of white Europe.

Not for Walcott, then, the handwringing of James Baldwin or the Barbadian novelist George Lamming before the white European culture that is at once profoundly alien yet the source of their art and the language in which they realize it.[33] Thus Walcott does not "Signify upon" Homer (though one could argue that he plays the literary trickster—the Signifying Monkey—with certain Caribbean texts). What strikes the reader about Walcott is the casual poise with which he appropriates Homeric personages and themes. Walcott's narrator admits to Omeros that he never actually finished *The Odyssey,* that his sense of an affinity derives from their shared awareness of the sea, "that elemental noise / of the windward, unbroken breakers, Ithaca's / or Africa's, all joining the ocean's voice . . ." (p. 130). Yet, "Master, I was the freshest of all your readers" (p. 283). The reader of Walcott's wonderful poem discovers no hint of creative exhaustion. This author's borrowing from Homer rather signals the recognition that the cultural riches of the past must remain available to all artists, whatever their nominal heritage. One also recognizes that Walcott, so sophisticated as to approach deracination, is as much a cultural outsider as the ancient Greek artist whose name means hostage. Like that earlier poet at the periphery of his society, Walcott nevertheless aspires to give literary myths to a whole people. *Omeros* goes far to define—as every epic should—a national ethos.

Walcott or Gardner, Joyce or Virgil, the guest author undertakes a conversation with the literary past, a one-sided epistemic dialogue that involves construing—or misconstruing—the position of the host author. The guest author, in other words, "reads" the host text in the act of replicating it. This construction can be friendly or unfriendly, but it will inevitably be as selective as any other act of reading. In its selectivity, moreover, such a symbiotic reading will take the investigator into the realms of reception theory, the anxiety of influence, and deconstruction.

As will be argued more concretely in the discussion of "The Sea and the Mirror" and *The Tempest* in chapter 7, one can nearly always understand the guest text as a reading of the host text. Louise M. Rosenblatt, viewing the possible number of readings of any given work of literature as unlimited, speaks of "the infinite series of possible interactions between individual minds and individual literary works."[34] Barth observes similarly that "literature can never be exhausted, if only because no single literary text can ever be exhausted—its 'meaning' residing as it does in its transactions with individual readers over time, space, and language."[35] This perception,

at the heart of response theory, means that the act of reading is collaborative—like literary symbiosis. Symbiosis, in other words, is merely a more active, palpable, and formalized act of reading. The symbiotic artist acts in the interests of all readers by defying, in effect, the monistic or otherwise tendentious criticism that aspires to final or definitive readings.

Monistic criticism, however, is in retreat as post-structuralist alternatives proliferate, shaping a criticism predicated on the death of the author and devoted to exploring the near-absolute plurality of meaning in texts, especially *scriptible* or "writable" texts—those sufficiently self-conscious or ambiguous or complex to allow readers full latitude in constructing meaning. If this new criticism does what the postmodern artist does (exploit or revel in the ultimate refusal of language to label reality rather than shape it), it nevertheless deserves less frequently than is sometimes claimed the respect accorded artistic creativity and originality. The work of the postmodern artist and the poststructuralist critic, alike in kind, seldom approaches parity in degree or quality (as has always been the case with imaginative literature and ordinary discourse, however artful and polished). The symbiotic artist, then, like the poststructuralist critic, insists on demonstrating the possibility of further readings and further meanings, but the producer of a symbiotic text, with the authority still enjoyed by the creative artist, is the more effective apologist for the free play of language and meaning.

Stanley Fish offers a reader-response model that dismisses the whole idea of meaning (he prefers to ask what this text *does*, not what it means), but he can at least be enlisted in the argument that a resistance to "coming to the point," a resistance to closure, is somehow basic in literature: "Coming to the point fulfills a need that most literature deliberately frustrates (if we open ourselves to it), the need to simplify and close."[36] Again, literary symbiosis provides the examples to validate this insight. Though unfriendly to the theories of Michael Riffaterre, Fish adduces Riffaterre's idea of "stylistic devices" that cheat or disappoint expectation and thereby preserve interest in a text. These devices, according to Riffaterre, "prevent the reader from inferring or predicting any important feature. For predictability may result in superficial reading; unpredictability will compel attention: the intensity of reception will correspond to the intensity of the message."[37] From Wordsworth to Shklovsky, theorists have argued that literature redeems the familiar. Literary symbiosis redeems the familiar in literature itself. By its seeming violation of some known and unsurprising text, literary symbiosis defamiliarizes and compels attention to that text.

In this special instance of the "reader" whose "response" to a text takes the form of another, variant text, one comes to the question of psychologi-

cal dependency or autonomy, and with it the question of whether the deliberateness of the symbiotic author's embrace of a literary forebear reveals anxiety or supreme confidence. Misled by authorial defensiveness, which can lead to assumptions about authorial furtiveness, theoretical analysts of "influence" never get around to symbiosis, the unapologetic embracing of a precursor. Symbiosis involves an appropriation of the precursor, and its boldness may argue maturation as much as Oedipal deference or anxiety. Though guest or latecomer texts be accompanied by postures of deference (sometimes merely projected into the text by a reader who expects such deference), one ought to be on the lookout for declarations in them of a paradoxical autonomy. Some authors come of age by writing symbiotic texts; others simply demonstrate their maturity and confidence in doing so.

Before concluding these introductory observations and proceeding to a further inventory of contemporary symbiosis, I should like briefly to consider the prior efforts already invested in this enterprise by two especially able fellow clerks. T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom, the awful father-precursors of my own critical effort, have surely defined the terms in which their successors may aspire sensibly to discuss the special type of influence under consideration here. I hope that no one will faint—as Freud did when challenged by Jung—if I nominate one of these critics as a candidate for father-killing, the other for ancestor worship. The honored ancestor, of course, is Eliot; the father-rival, Bloom.

In analyzing the relationship between "tradition" and the "individual talent," Eliot argues that, contrary to expectation schooled by an uncritical valuation of "originality," the literary past figures with greatest cogency and authority in the work of the mature artist. Thus Eliot emphasizes that he speaks not of "the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity" when he suggests that "we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." In other words, if Eliot is apropos, he would seem to invite us to see the symbiotic impulse or tropism as one of a number of options for the artist mindful of the seemingly contradictory need to "make it new" and to incorporate the tradition:

> what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work ar-

> rives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.[38]

The study of symbiosis affords an opportunity to see this alteration of "relations, proportions, values," to see just how precisely Eliot describes the relationship between literary past and literary present, between literary parents and their offspring.

This relationship between literary parents and their offspring is the burden of Harold Bloom's argument, in *The Anxiety of Influence,* for a psychopoetics of challenge and subversion. Every "strong" poet's emergence, according to Bloom, involves some kind of besting, if not killing, of the father (of course, historically, the besting is all the easier if the precursor or host is a mother, for such hosts, as Virginia Woolf was first to suggest, are often anonymous, hence easily appropriated). Indeed, according to Bloom's own succinct thesis statement, "*Poetic influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation.*"[39]

Bloom engagingly acknowledges a measure of anxiety on his own part as he names the critical fathers whom he admires yet struggles with for autonomy. He leaves moot the question of whether or not he "misreads" his critical forebears, but he certainly challenges Eliot's picture of a cosy relationship between the tradition (Bloom's "precursor") and the individual talent (Bloom's "ephebe"). Eliot promotes an ideal of impersonality that the literary latecomer might be expected to embrace: what better way to mortify personality than to submerge it in that of a precursor in the course of an act of literary symbiosis? But Bloom argues that the latecomer must, through a kind of psychomachia, struggle with the influence of the terrible literary father. Ultimately, says Bloom, the "strong poet" puts the "precursor" into the id, not the superego (p. 80). Thus the precursor becomes an instinctual presence rather than a censorial or judgmental one.

Bloom's sixfold typology of influence and the anxieties attendant thereon need not be limited to poetry, and in all genres one finds Bloom's categories of influence anxiety useful in describing the relationship between symbiotic latecomers and precursors. Certainly what he calls *tessera,* or completion of the precursor's work, describes a novel like Bob Coleman's *The Later Adventures of Tom Jones* (1985) or Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Coleman takes up Fielding's character twenty years after the conclusion of the original tale and takes him into the era of American independence. *Wide Sargasso Sea*

amplifies *Jane Eyre* with an account of Bertha Rochester's early years, enabling Rhys to make explicit what remains repressed in Brontë's text.

Another manifestation of influence anxiety is *askesis,* defined as "a self-curtailment which seeks transformation at the expense of narrowing the creative circumference of precursor and ephebe alike" (p. 119). The ephebe accepts "a sacrifice of some part of himself whose absence will individuate him more, as a poet" (p. 121). As examples, Bloom cites Wordsworth, Wallace Stevens ("an *askesis* of the entire Romantic tradition," p. 135), and others; symbiotic examples might include the Stoppard who sacrifices the heroic and tragic potentialities of drama to execute a vaudeville *Hamlet* or the Vonnegut who, in *Galápagos,* curtails parallels with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Conrad's *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* According to Bloom, the curtailment applies to the precursor as well as to the ephebe; thus Vonnegut obliquely impugns Shakespeare's inchoate utopianism and Conrad's casual racism (Vonnegut's villainous James Wait, named for Conrad's title character, is not black, and he dies before landfall at an island that, exempt from the evil he personifies, will evolve into a new Eden).

In another of Bloom's categories, *apophrades* or "return of the dead" (p. 15), "the later poet himself" seems to have "written the precursor's characteristic work" (p. 16). One thinks immediately of that supreme postmodernist parable of symbiosis, Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." Menard, a Frenchman, sets out to write *Don Quixote,* or at least "a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes."[40] He succeeds in producing a couple of fragments wherein "Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical." But a strange effect manifests itself, for "the second is almost infinitely richer" (p. 42). Menard's apologist, narrator of Borges's story, finds that he now reads "the *Quixote*—all of it—as if Menard had conceived it" (p. 40). Borges's narrator is even pleased to recognize Menard's style here and there in Cervantes.

The reader who objects that Pierre Menard is imaginary should remember that Borges makes the same point in his essay on Kafka: "Every writer *creates* his own precursors."[41] An author who has done so with particular authority—and who might thereby be said to exemplify *apophrades*—is John Barth, notably in *The Sot-Weed Factor,* which is symbiotically attached to a seventeenth-century poem of the same title by an obscure Maryland poet whom Barth makes his protagonist. Barth's novel entirely displaces this slight work, but in addition to being attached symbiotically to a particular host text, *The Sot-Weed Factor* parodies two whole genres: it burlesques the historical novel at the same time that it ironically recapitulates

the eighteenth-century picaresque novel of Smollett and Fielding. *The Sot-Weed Factor,* in other words, is an eighteenth-century novel in quotation marks, spoofed and given an ironic edge sharper than that of its precursors—and after reading it, one does in fact return to authentic eighteenth-century novels with the strange sensation of recognizing Barth's style in them.

The Sot-Weed Factor seems also to fit Bloom's category of *daemonization,* in which "the later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor" (p. 15). What is this "beyond" if not the possibilities inherent in the realm of ironic duplication and postmodernist parody? But the possibility of placing Barth's novel in this second category reveals a problem: however helpful, Bloom's categories do not always seem clearly to differentiate, and the difficulty is not simply that one wishes to apply them to genres other than poetry. Is *Wide Sargasso Sea* really *daemonization* or *tessera?* Rhys certainly "completes," but she also opens herself to a power in the parent work that Brontë herself found relatively little latitude to express. And the sympathetic treatment of Mrs. Rochester also suggests *clinamen,* the "swerve" away from the direction taken by the precursor—not to mention *Kenosis* or "movement towards discontinuity with the precursor" (p. 14). The usefulness of Bloom's categories, then, may lie primarily in their attributes, which detail some of the many ways in which literary symbiosis can occur.

This possibility leaves one to consider literary symbiosis as an enterprise less determined by Oedipal anxiety (also less combative, less dishonest, less disingenuous) than Bloom's model allows. Perhaps, as Hélène Cixous has suggested, the time has come to "get away from the dialectic which has it that the only good father is a dead one."[42] Though without doubt psychoanalysis must remain one of the instruments whereby the critic assesses the guest text and its author, and though I shall often touch on psychoanalytic issues in the chapters that follow this one (notably in discussions of Stoppard's relation to Shakespeare and Rhys's to Brontë), I would emphasize that there is more to symbiosis than the psychoanalytic myth permits the critic to grasp. Like the Flaubertian formula *ne pas conclure,* literary symbiosis is the expression of a resistance to closure; if it is also, at times, the vehicle of anxiety about the past and its parental artists, it very seldom seems the product of pathologies of emulation but rather of the common neuroses—and these it tends healthily to resolve. Whether Oedipal or Electral, these neuroses commonly eventuate in identification with, not slaying of, the parent—and possession of a mate/theme/text that, in the last

analysis, is only *like* the literary parent's. Thus the reader distinguishes the symbiotic guest author or latecomer as occupying a less unconscious position than Bloom's ephebe. If this reader encounters Oedipal dynamics in some measure from time to time, these are less in the realm of instinct than of reason, for the guest author puts the precursor not into the id, as Bloom argues, but into the ego of rational consciousness. As Freud himself said, "Where id was, there ego shall be." Perhaps the last word—for now—should come from Loy D. Martin, who essays to reconcile the positions staked by Eliot, Bloom, and others on the question of originality vis-à-vis a dauntingly rich literary past. Martin argues that the transforming of the "tradition" takes place as a result of the encounter with past literature of the language and culture that shaped the individual artist. "The poet," he says, "is the well-instructed missionary of the language which constitutes both his own subjectivity and that of his culture. And the site of his mission is the literary past."[43]

Missionaries, of course, routinely invert the pagan hierarchies encountered in faraway lands, and I should therefore like to conclude these preliminary remarks on literary symbiosis by glancing at its affinities with a theoretical discipline that, more than any other, denies stable meanings. Deconstruction, though often decried as nihilistic, may prove the master trope for understanding literary symbiosis. Indeed, deconstruction—especially as what Gregory Ulmer calls "applied grammatology"[44]—seems more satisfying as an artistic technique than as a critical methodology. The point about deconstruction is that it can never be completed—there is no stable point at which critically deconstructive analysis can rest. Deconstructive symbiosis, like any other kind of deconstruction, undertakes "to dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way."[45] Like literature itself, in other words, it resists closure, and in its symbiotic guise—in, for example, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly,* which stands the familiar Puccini opera on its head—one sees with particular clarity that deconstruction leaves texts not ruined but freshly configured. As Spivak says, "Deconstruction seems to offer a way out of the closure of knowledge. By inaugurating the open-endedness of textuality—by thus 'placing in the abyss' (*mettre en abîme*), as the French expression would literally have it—it shows us the lure of the abyss as freedom. The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom."[46] To deconstruct is always, paradoxically, to make new—at least where literature is concerned. As literary symbiosis, deconstruction at once foregrounds a

universal intertextuality and makes possible the continued production of new art from the seemingly exhausted loins of old art.

But these preliminaries must have an end, and I shall conclude in earnest with a brief recapitulation of my argument thus far. The subject examined here, literary symbiosis, might seem to reveal the age that produces it as hopelessly inferior to the age or ages—almost invariably more purposive—that produced the host texts. The latecomer artist, moreover, would seem to run the risk of being perceived by readers as lacking in maturity and originality; readers may, indeed, assume that the production of a guest text is somehow less admirable than the production of a host text. Yet the latecomers with their "stolentelling" rise above such residual cultural disquiet. Neither exhausted nor effete, they prove agents of renewal. They realize Barth's augury of replenishment, if in ways somewhat different from those he envisioned in 1968 and 1980.

Though literary symbiosis no doubt falls into that vast category called influence, it is influence at its most explicit and recognizable and thus not always amenable to critical models that depend on a poetics of instinctual, unconscious struggle. Like all dynamic strategies of artistic reinvigoration, literary symbiosis proves protean and multiform; indeed, it can begin to seem ubiquitous, a kind of unified field theory for literature. But in what follows I shall exclude mere sibling texts to concentrate on that species of symbiosis involving some tangible measure of formal or thematic evolution, whether on the part of the guest alone or the host and guest together. Nor need one apologize for speaking of retroactive thematic modification of host texts. Though hardly a routine feature of symbiosis, this "uncanny effect" (as Bloom calls it), this idea of Borges's that "every writer *creates* his own precursors," is a legitimate phenomenon wherein one recognizes one of the most distinctive features of postmodernism.

2 TRAGEDY AND THE "POST-ABSURD"

Hamlet and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*

However benign, symbiosis has a subversive tendency; the latecomer's exploitation of a host text more or less naturally begins with its aporias, those places in it where object threatens to subvert subject, where the assumption or absolute that provides the text's epistemological bedrock begins to buckle at the unruly plate tectonics of cultural givens and culturally defined meaning. In what follows I shall discuss the relationship between *Hamlet* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* in three sections: the first focusing on a further discussion of symbiosis as "reading," with a consideration of the Oedipal and deconstructive valences in Stoppard's play; the second focusing on questions regarding the viability of tragedy in the modern world, especially as that world was defined, in Stoppard's formative years and early career, by French existentialism; the third focusing on the ways in which Stoppard's drama exemplifies its postmodernist moment—and modifies one's understanding of a classic tragedy—by its tendency toward the purely ludic. My argument, ultimately, is that Stoppard's first major work is as it were on a kind of conceptual cusp: its central element of postmodernist play does not entirely disguise a residual Angst. Indeed, even as Stoppard deconstructs *Hamlet* by exposing and exploiting its aporias (notably the questions that figure when one examines and reflects on the two most insignificant characters in the Shakespearean host), so can one identify and probe the unease and disquiet—concerning death, for example—that preclude one's taking *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* as the perfectly hermetic piece of self-referential play it aspires to be.

Fathers and Sons

Why do writers produce symbiotic works? Often they do so to avail themselves of the familiarity and intelligibility of the host texts, the better to present insights that might otherwise falter in their abstraction. Perhaps, too, one produces a symbiotic work to congratulate oneself—consciously or otherwise—on the absence through death of some literary parent or other. Bloom wryly suggests that the unstated emotion of most elegy is "profound joy" on the part of the elegists, whose subject tends to be not their grief but their "creative anxieties."[1] The corollary to these observations would seem to be that the production of a symbiont can signal an artist's coming of age. Even the ostensibly mature writer can undergo such a passage, for Freud suggests that Oedipal anxieties tend to recur throughout the course of a life, so that the writing of a symbiotic work may prove the delayed attempt to resolve an Oedipal fixation. Freud also shows how "everyday life" invariably witnesses to the mechanisms of repression, however attenuated or unproblematic. Thus the production of a guest text by an accomplished writer like, say, John Updike, may reflect the delayed resolution of an Oedipal relationship. For others, the coming of age is more literal, the Oedipal resolution more dramatic; one notes in this connection that some of the most noteworthy symbioses announce maturations. John Gardner's *Grendel* was his first major novel, and John Gay "arrived" with *The Beggar's Opera,* as did Stoppard in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern.*

The stature of the host text, not to mention that of the host author, provides one measure of the would-be symbiotic writer's ambition and confidence. When Jay Cantor, in *Krazy Kat* (1987), makes a comic strip into a novel, he need not worry about appearing an intellectual or artistic pygmy beside the author of his original (nor, for that matter, need he worry about being reproached for treating a piece of popular culture with high aesthetic respect, for the studied mixing of popular and high-cultural modes, far from rendering work suspect in taste, nowadays announces its postmodernist credentials). By the same token, John Barth need have no fear that anyone will dismiss his *Sot-Weed Factor* as inferior to the obscure poem on which he bases his vast allegorical novel. But what about the author—Joyce in *Ulysses,* for example—who challenges some undisputed classic? Such an author courts either recognition as an immortal among immortals or dismissal for delusions of grandeur. Stoppard has produced symbiotic work over this entire spectrum: in addition to recasting *Macbeth* as *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* as *Travesties* (1975), he has adapted Slawomir Mrozek's *Tango* (1968), García Lorca's *The House*

of Bernarda Alba (produced 1973), Schnitzler's *Das Weite Land* (*Undiscovered Country,* 1980), and Johann Nestroy's *Einen Jux will er sich machen* (*On the Razzle,* 1981). *Hamlet* has twice attracted Stoppard's wittily subversive intellect—in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) and in the less well known *Dogg's Hamlet* (1979), which is Shakespeare's play with only the famous bits left in.

In challenging Shakespeare, the most daunting of literary fathers, Stoppard provides, if nothing else, an extraordinary example of literary chutzpah. Even Goethe, as the German poet makes clear in the conversations with Eckermann, lacked this kind of boldness. Eckermann reports:

> We discoursed upon English literature, on the greatness of Shakespeare; and on the unfavourable position held by all English dramatic authors who had appeared after that poetical giant.
>
> "A dramatic talent of any importance," said Goethe, "could not help forbear to notice Shakespeare's works; nay, could not forbear to study him. Having studied them, he must be aware that Shakespeare has already exhausted the whole of human nature in all its tendencies, in all its heights and depths, and that in fact there remains for him, the aftercomer, nothing more to do. And how get courage only to put pen to paper, if conscious, in an earnest appreciating spirit, that such unfathomable and unattainable excellences were already in existence!
>
> "It fared better with me fifty years ago in my own dear Germany. I could soon come to an end with all that then existed; it could not long awe me, or occupy my attention. I soon left German literature behind me, and turned to life and to production. So on and on I went in my own natural development, and at every step my standard was not much higher than what at such step I was able to attain. But had I been born an Englishman, and had all those numerous masterpieces been brought before me in all their power, at my first dawn of youthful consciousness, they would have overpowered me, and I should not have known what to do. I could not have gone on with such fresh light-heartedness; but should have had to bethink myself, and look about for a long time, to find some new outlet."[2]

Stoppard, in accepting in its most direct form the challenge to follow Shakespeare, does what the great German poet declares that he himself could not have done, and in effect compares himself with not one but two of Western literature's titans. Indeed, this least inhibited of symbiotic writers emulates one precursor in the drama after another, from Wilde to García Lorca.

But before proceeding to a further consideration of the relevance to symbiosis of Stoppard's Oedipal daring (not to mention Shakespeare's own affinity for Oedipal themes), I would like to place such psychoanalytic considerations in a somewhat broader critical and theoretical context. In writing a version of *Hamlet,* Stoppard performs an act of criticism, produces a "reading" neither more nor less cogent than does, say, Hugh Kenner, who somewhere remarks that in *Hamlet* "every scene and speech seems striving to be the definitive formulation of the play," or T. S. Eliot, who observes trenchantly that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* lacks an "objective correlative" for the psychological problem of its hero: "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear."[3] But Stoppard's reading shapes what Normand Berlin calls the "Theater of Criticism."[4] *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* reveals the natural, perhaps universal grounding of the symbiotic text in a reading or deconstructive rereading of the host text.

I am aware that terms like "reading" and "deconstruction" commonly figure in a critical, rather than artistic, vocabulary. But given its special character, symbiosis seems to require such terms to describe its dynamics, which obliterate the boundary between "primary" and "secondary" texts—thereby illustrating a thesis widespread among poststructuralist critics who have long asserted that the convolutions of language and meaning do not support such a distinction. As Wlad Godzich explains,

> The . . . opposition of primary text and secondary discourse. . . . suggests that in the primary text the truth remains somehow burdened by its mode of presentation, and it acts upon the belief that the truth can be attained and that indeed it can be given a better representation, of which the secondary text would be the very instantiation. In other words, the primary vs. secondary opposition is predicated upon a prior opposition, which it locates in the primary text, between a truth or meaning to be disclosed and the means of that disclosure. Although apparently granting the primary text the status of . . . a symbol where the relation of sign to referent or signifier to signified . . . is fully motivated, the very practice of a secondary discourse is at least implicitly or unconsciously grounded in the belief that such a congruence has not been achieved, may not be achievable, or that it can be ruptured at will, since this practice proposes to substitute its own product—its text—as the vehicle for transporting the truth. Blindly, it sees itself as a better representation of the truth, whereas it is in fact

> engaged in an allegorical relation of mapping one sign with another, of sublating one sign by another.[5]

Few readers of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* at any rate, make the primary-versus-secondary text differentiation. In this instance, symbiosis seems understandable most readily as reading—a kind of reading uncontaminated by the tedium and tendentiousness often attaching to criticism.

"The encounter between latecomer and precursor," says Paul de Man, glossing Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence,* is "a displaced version of the paradigmatic encounter between reader and text."[6] Stoppard's play is an ideal example of the reader-response critique that effectively blurs and subverts the distinction between primary and secondary text. The symbiotic guest text, in other words, merely reifies one of the infinite number of possible readings of any text. It is the apotheosis—or at least the definitive version—of reader-response criticism.

But Stoppard's reading of *Hamlet* is also deconstructive, for the author of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* develops his symbiotic play by focusing on *Hamlet*'s two most inconsequential characters—the king's creatures or tools—and the superficially condign punishment meted out to them. When Horatio, on hearing of the clever strategem whereby Hamlet saves himself at the expense of the courtiers' lives, remarks, "So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to't," Hamlet makes one of his most cruel observations:

> Why, man they did make love to this employment;
> They are not near my conscience; their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow:
> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensed points
> Of mighty opposites (*Hamlet* V.ii.56–62).[7]

Subsequently, in a line that appears in both Shakespeare and Stoppard, Horatio observes cryptically that Claudius "never gave commandment for their death" (*Hamlet* V.ii.386).[8] Stoppard, then, selects the minor detail in *Hamlet* that makes one uncomfortable. The hero dismisses these lives too callously. Stoppard pulls on this thread, and the play, along with its moral center and its tragic rationale, begins to unravel. He has, in other words, seized on a kind of textual impasse (Hamlet is the hero, yet Hamlet behaves ignominiously) to set his symbiotic text in motion.

But the richer source of aporias, of impasses and contradictions, is psychology, and one sees in Stoppard's willingness to compete professionally

with the world's greatest dramatist a complicated Oedipal drama—complicated on the one hand in that Stoppard actually lost his father at an early age and, on the other, in that Shakespeare himself often projects Oedipal emotions. In the sonnets, for example, the speaker at times characterizes himself as child to the parental Dark Lady and Young Man (in sonnet 143, the poet is a neglected "babe" who begs that his mistress will "play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind"). In the later works, notably *Hamlet,* these hints become full-scale dramas of Oedipally valenced cuckoldry and betrayal. Freud in fact considered naming his most famous theory after Hamlet instead of Oedipus, for Hamlet suffers from an Oedipal crisis: his uncle Claudius, who has killed King Hamlet and married his widow, has vicariously realized the prince's own basic Oedipal wish, thereby paralyzing the son with vicarious Oedipal guilt.[9]

Ironically, Stoppard's own Oedipally daring enterprise involves rewriting the supreme Oedipal drama of his supreme dramaturgical father. Though he places Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the center of the action rather than Hamlet, the Oedipal theme remains central—if subversively reimagined. Actually, if one can accept Norman Holland's suggestion that a phallic phase of libido development (not part of Freud's original schema) precedes the Oedipal phase, one has the perfect instrument with which to gauge Stoppard's recharting of *Hamlet*'s psychoanalytic course. Holland justifies his refinement of the Freudian paradigm by noting that "the single most common fantasy-structure in literature is phallic assertiveness balanced against oral engulfment." He could be describing *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* when he notes that "phallic fantasies often symbolize the phallus by the whole body; then phallic fantasies can becomes stories of poking or prying into things, particularly in a fearful or helpless way."[10]

Constantly threatened with engulfment by the circumambient meaninglessness (however meaningful, from another perspective, as *Hamlet*), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern probe their situation with incremental fear and trembling, and in their fated end one recognizes hints of the supreme Oedipal punishment. Shakespeare suggests that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are beheaded, but Stoppard, perhaps made nervous by this symbolic castration, has them stabbed—at least in mime. Ironically, on the single occasion that Guildenstern attempts to take action, he enacts a transparent fantasy of phallic inadequacy vis-à-vis the "father." When Guildenstern attacks the smug and cynical Player, whose knowledge and sophistication seem gallingly to grow throughout the play, he finds that he has thus asserted himself with a retractable prop dagger, an instrument incapable—whatever the construction put upon the word—of "penetration."

The Player, of course, resembles Shakespeare—shrewd actor-manager, all-knowing bard, terrible father. One recognizes his would-be murderer, on one level, as the filial Stoppard, who seems paradoxically to kill and not to kill the father by rewriting his play. The rewriting, with its overtones of phallic emulation, extends to Stoppard's manipulation of the play within the play, which is absolutely essential to the smooth unfolding of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern.* In Shakespeare, the play within the play serves the Freudian explanation of Hamlet's paralysis. The staging of *The Murder of Gonzago,* symbolically a staging of that other "drama" whereby Claudius secured his throne and his queen, is an especially powerful moment because it focuses the Oedipal dynamics at several levels. Holland, with support from Freud and Fenichel, suggests that the representation in drama of another drama often lends itself to interpretation as a symbolic treatment of the primal scene: parental intercourse as witnessed or merely imagined by their offspring.[11] Thus the conflictedness of this sequence derives from the synergistic interaction of Claudius's guilt and Hamlet's Oedipal anxieties, complicated here by the conflation of parental intercourse (whereby Hamlet is conceived) and a double betrayal (the child's mother belongs sexually to the father; the child's mother connives at the father's murder).

In *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* the Player, his actors, and the play within the play become major elements in the action. Indeed, as the *Gonzago* dumbshow modulates into a dumbshow *Hamlet,* the actors modulate from Player-King, Player-Queen, Player-Nephew, et al to Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and the principles of the host text. In this scene and the concluding scene, in which the actors mime out *Hamlet*'s tragic denouement, all of the Shakespeare original is reprised within Stoppard's play—and more economically, even, than in the hilariously accelerated *Dogg's Hamlet,* Stoppard's later version of Shakespeare's play. To put it another way, the primal scene proves to have engendered not only the Prince of Denmark but also a certain prince of London's West End, who finds in it, moreover, the embryo of his own play. Child challenges parent, and the play within the play in *Hamlet,* once part of Shakespeare's Oedipal drama, becomes the very heart of Stoppard's.

Tragedy and Existentialism

The symbiosis with *Hamlet* also poses the question of genre: not "is *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* tragedy or comedy?" but "what becomes of the tragic idea as Shakespeare's play metamorphoses into Stoppard's?" By recasting a famous tragedy in contemporary language, with an action per-

haps best described as absurdist (or, as a number of critics would have it, "post-absurdist") tragicomedy, Stoppard forces his audience to confront just how alienated it is from the kind of *epistemé* that could generate and sustain tragic elevation. Once the audience at a sacred drama felt awe at the suffering of the noble in an orderly universe; later, though the nobility of the sufferer remained a comfortable given, the universe began to seem less orderly as new science called all in doubt; and now audiences are reduced to snickering nervously at the pratfalls of their trivial, absurd selves on the same stage. By the same token, serious playwrights seem less inclined to produce traditional comedic celebrations of social and cosmic harmony. Instead they produce a bitter comedy that seduces the audience into viewing the sufferings of humanity as risible.

But where comedy survives in its less genial forms, tragedy languishes. The symbiotic relationship between *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* must be understood in terms of a post-Romantic intellectual and cultural climate fundamentally inimical to tragedy as classically conceived—the noble protagonist, the achievement of anagnorisis, the affirmation of a just order beyond fated suffering. Stoppard, one finds, roots his tragicomic hybrid in soil prepared on the one hand by Sartre and Beckett and on the other by the linguistic philosophers, critical theorists, and literary practitioners who have shaped a postmodernist aesthetic.

In Stoppard's version of *Hamlet,* then, the inconsequential Rosencrantz and Guildenstern supplant the noble protagonist, as in fact they have figuratively done (in plays by Rice, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Pinter, Ionesco, et al) on the modern and contemporary stage. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know that there is another, more sensible version of the events in which they are caught up—just as playgoers familiar with *Hamlet* know that the events before them are, in another configuration, part of a grand, tragic action. But neither the contemporary playgoer nor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can get at the other version. The playgoer can read or view *Hamlet,* but always with the reservation that the worldview necessary to the play's ultimate meaningfulness is no longer viable. The playgoers—like all their contemporaries—cannot go home again, any more than Stoppard's unhappy characters, who lament that once "there were answers to everything. . . . answers everywhere you *looked*" (p. 38). All must face the bitter query in Eliot's "Gerontion": "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?"

In *Hamlet,* the line "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead" (V.ii.382) ties up a loose plot end, but as the title of Stoppard's play the line suggests a kind of existential given: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were never alive, for they were only characters in a play. Moreover, they were singularly in-

consequential characters, and thus lifeless twice over. Yet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are we. In other words, the play concerns more than the fanciful idea that the grand workings of tragedy might be incomprehensible to the minor figures in the tragedy. It forces us to see our own plight as that of baffled, inconsequential nonentities unable to understand our own suffering and the forces around us.

This plight is "existential"—a term so dated, clichéd, and imprecise as to have fallen into disfavor in literary criticism. But inasmuch as existentialism was still an influential philosophy when this play was written, and inasmuch as Stoppard himself has characterized Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "existential immortals,"[12] I propose to avail myself of the useful adjective that implies a philosophical outlook characterized by dread or "Angst" fostered by the perception that supernatural justification for human suffering—along with the very idea that human existence has some absolute meaning—is an illusion. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, then, are *existentially* representative figures. If all the world is a stage, then one must remember the paucity of major roles. How many suffer and die nobly like Hamlet? For every Hamlet with a sense of purpose, there are myriads who are merely the bit players in someone else's drama, and most human beings are versions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This democratization of tragedy, which makes it something other than tragedy, is another of the reasons for constructing the play in such a way as to keep Rosencrantz and Guildenstern always on stage. The playwright wants to preserve the almost claustrophobic sense of their existential myopia—relieved for the members of the audience only by their knowledge of another version of the action.

One ought to keep in mind one of Stoppard's later raids on *Hamlet*. In *Dogg's Hamlet,* as noted previously, Stoppard excises all but the most familiar passages from the original drama. The result, which someone once compared to a videotape on fast-forward, reveals among other things just how intimately we know Shakespeare's play—how much of it we have stored in the *Bartlett's* of memory. More than an intellectual joke, it is another example of a symbiotic statement about the meanings congenial to one cultural moment and those manageable at another, not to mention an observation about the attrition of the attention span in an accelerated world. It is also a shocking reminder—with its hint that the very pace of contemporary life precludes tragic feeling—of the gulf between tragedy and its age and the darkly tendentious comedy that seems most congenial to the present.

Stoppard seems aware not only of the history of tragedy but also of a variety of specifically twentieth-century meditations on the subject. He would know, for example, of the suggestive remarks about Hamlet, Ophe-

lia, and other tragic characters in Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli." Speaking of the anxious years that seemed clearly to herald another great war, Yeats suggests that "All perform their tragic play." But paradoxically the tragedians "Do not break up their lines to weep. / They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay." The poet describes a carving of ancient "Chinamen" in lapis lazuli: "their eyes, / Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay."[13] Yeats suggests that the person depicted in a work of art, whether carved jewel or tragic drama, must be aware of an exemption from time—or, rather, aware of art's ability to recover from the ravages of time. Thus the tragic protagonist and the artist who stands perpetually ready to make all new again experience what in another poem Yeats calls "tragic joy"—the only emotion appropriate to those aware of the cyclical nature of existence: all things perish periodically, yet all things wax new in time.

This doctrine of cyclical recurrence (an idea that Yeats, like Joyce, owes ultimately to Plato, Vico, Nietzsche, and Eastern mysticism) reveals a less appealing side in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett depicts not tragic joy or elevation but despair unrelieved by any of the givens of tragedy—notably the predication of an orderly and ultimately meaningful universe. Beckett's characters are derelicts who suffer meaninglessly and go on suffering without hope of relief. Moreover, the playwright structures the drama in such a way as to comment ironically on the very idea of artistic and specifically dramatic immutability. When the first act of Beckett's play is followed by another act in which virtually the same action takes place, and when, too, the principle of infinite repetition is illustrated in a moronic song that, endlessly looping back on itself, continually stages its own resumption ("A dog came in the kitchen / And stole a crust of bread," etc.), the audience receives a message diametrically opposed to that of Yeats. Beckett mocks even the Yeatsian "gaiety," for Didi and Gogo are quite bitterly funny in their desperation.

As Clive Barnes first noted, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* has nearly as much to do with the Beckett play as with *Hamlet*.[14] Stoppard continues Beckett's dialogue with Yeats and Nietzsche by offering fresh versions of infinite repetition and "gaiety." "Be happy," says Rosencrantz in the closing moments of the play; "if you're not even *happy* what's so good about surviving?" (p. 121). Like *Godot, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* concerns the sufferings of two hapless nonentities who have trouble with, among other things, keeping their pants up. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like their brothers in Beckett, are always on stage. The comic interchangeability of Stoppard's two heroes (interchangeable even in their own eyes) is a further reminder of Beckett's Didi and Gogo.

This interchangeability invites a recognition of the insignificance of these two. They do not count for much in life or in the great and meaningful drama of Hamlet's tragic revenge—not that this play allows one to differentiate life and theater very much. The playwright hints that identity depends to a considerable degree on extrapsychological accident: is one really anybody if one cannot depend on a set of contingencies that include a place, relations with others, a job, and so forth? Prisoners consider solitary confinement a dread punishment because, more than simple deprivation of society, it is potentially a deprivation of identity, of self. In a void, how long would one be sure of one's name, much less a sense of one's actual consequence as a person? This stripping away of the fundamental supports to a sense of identity contributes to the puzzlement of the two heroes over their summons by the king, for they receive no briefing, no "filling in." They are expected to function without full knowledge of their place in the action, and only at the end do they realize the full price of their ignorance: their lives.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern recur frequently to the circumstances of their summons to appear at court because it is the moment when their mysterious destiny crystallized, also the moment when the truths they embody (the truths of contemporary doubt regarding the individual's identity and place in the universe) are shown forth in a secular epiphany. Stoppard presents Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as contemporary magi, summoned but given no "direction" (p. 20), obliged to witness another painful change in dispensation. The epiphany embraces even the ongoing joke regarding their names: they have not "come all this way for a christening" (p. 39), remarks Guildenstern. "Christening" means "making Christian," and these magi have been summoned to witness to a decidedly post-Christian experience of cosmic and existential disorientation. The new dispensation is a falling off, and, short a magus, its very epiphany is attenuated.

The new dispensation, like the diminishment of identity, receives considerable definition through setting. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle with their fate at first in "A place without any visible character" (p. 11), then "on a boat" (p. 98) en route from Denmark to England. Thus the first part of the play transpires in the same kind of place one visits in *Waiting for Godot,* and again one perceives a metaphor for the universe as a bare and comfortless place in which pathetic humanity absurdly and pointlessly suffers. This microcosmic conceit comes more sharply into focus in the last act, for the sailing vessel has long symbolized the human community writ small—a little world hurtling through a formless and often hostile element.

Stoppard further defines the new dispensation in the play's theme of life as a game of chance. One can hardly escape the prominence of gambling imagery, especially in the first part of the play. Why does the coin keep coming up heads? It does so in part to tease an audience presumably hungry for "meaning," and indeed one cannot resist considering reasons why this violation of probability might be plausible—and thematically meaningful. One considers, for example, that in a universe of pure chance a tossed coin might, whatever probability may assert, come down heads over and over and over again. Perhaps, too, one reflects that the contemporary world has only probability with which to replace the outmoded model of cause and effect. The philosopher-scientists of the eighteenth century thought that they could learn the laws of physics and other sciences and predict with certainty how for every action there would be an equal and opposite reaction. But the particle physics of the twentieth century teaches that matter behaves randomly, and one can only speak in terms of probability with regard to predicting its behavior.

An older model than that of the eighteenth century posited a creation in which a divinity shaped ends, however individuals might rough-hew them. But Rosencrantz and Guildenstern receive no comfort from either Renaissance cosmology or modern physics—or anything in between. Doomed by chance, they are paradoxically playing in a fixed game. Hence the Player's appalling remark: "Life is a gamble, at terrible odds—if it was a bet you wouldn't take it" (p. 115).

But these explanations of the coin-tossing business miss the real point, a simple one viewers are programmed to resist. Like Guildenstern's climactic "murder" of the Player, the extraordinary run of heads at the beginning of the play is intended to challenge the viewer's uncritical embracing of an illusion. That a coin can come up heads any number of times *in a work of art* is—as will be seen in part three of my discussion—merely one of several means whereby the playwright obliges his audience to recognize that illusion, or more accurately artifice, is not so much his method as his subject.

Mirrors, Dumbshows, Embedding

No one would mistake *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* for *Hamlet* in modern dress. In fact, the characters appear in Elizabethan costume. Even so, the audience perceives the action and the characters as grounded not in the creative anxieties of the seventeenth century but in the dead-end anxieties of the twentieth. The action of the play does not issue from character, as in traditional dramaturgy and narrative. This unsettling dis-

junction between character and action marks the play as postmodern; its basic joke has the main characters struggling in the midst of an action they find themselves utterly helpless to shape or influence. The language, too, stamps the play as a product of twentieth-century art. From time to time, as Ronald Hayman notes, Stoppard introduces actual lines from Shakespeare, thereby shocking his audience with the richness and energy of Elizabethan verse as compared with the gracelessness of modern speech—even at its most witty.[15] Modern humanity, Stoppard implies, lacks an instrument with which to make poetry of its suffering.

Stoppard makes Shakespeare's play over as a kind of hybrid pastoral. This he does, in the well-known formulation of William Empson, by putting the complex into the simple. In the original, Shakespeare allows the personal complexity of Hamlet and the political complexity of the Danish court to compound the thematic vision of political, Oedipal, spiritual, and aesthetic involution. Stoppard, though he does not translate the action to some Forest of Arden, dispenses with Shakespeare's foregrounding of the complex situation and setting. Moreover, he focuses on *Hamlet*'s least important characters and their actions. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, amusingly afflicted with the same problems of volition that dog Hamlet, are the swains in this pastoral, engaged in the conventional dialogue on the traditional Big Questions of mortality and meaning—here couched in terms of contingency, randomness, uncertainty, and absurdity.

But pastoral is also parodied here, and parody, as noted previously, is inherently symbiotic. To put it another way, postmodernist fictions, as they replicate older fictions, tend naturally to parody: they depend on irony and subversion of any and all fictions previously taken for reality or truth. Nevertheless, Stoppard's play, whether characterized as parodic, postmodern, or symbiotic, revitalizes as it subverts. Thus even as the truth quotient of the host text diminishes, even as its pretensions to absolute insight dissipate, the host benefits from the attachment of its postmodern guest, for Stoppard's symbiotic dramaturgy has the effect of encouraging one to return to Shakespeare—as the nineteenth century did (it was Goethe and Coleridge, according to Hardin Craig, who first insisted that there was such a thing as "the problem of Hamlet")[16]—to contemplate with a fresh mind the significance of Shakespeare's appropriation of previous versions of the story he made definitively his. In rewriting an older Hamlet play by Thomas Kyd, Shakespeare presumably refined the material while remaining within the established conventions of revenge tragedy. But did he merely "refine" Kyd's play, as Kyd himself may have manipulated material from Saxo Grammaticus as transmitted by Belleforest? Or did he not rather reshape the

revenge tragedy, making it more psychologically and dramatically subtle—just as Stoppard revised *his* source, reshaping not only the story but also the medium to create a drama wholly different from its antecedents?

Critics think that the old *Hamlet* contained the play within the play, and a comparison of its use there to its use by Shakespeare might—were such a comparison possible—be critically very worthwhile. But however this feature came to be in Shakespeare's play, it can profitably be meditated on as something curiously essential, something wherein one discovers that the Renaissance was onto intertextuality and self-reflexivity long before they became the shibboleths of a literary era chastened by new linguistic and epistemological philosophy. Hamlet, after all, performs an act of revision before the very eyes and ears of the audience when he rewrites *The Murder of Gonzago* (itself "pirated from the Italian," as Stoppard's Player remarks, p. 65) the better to promote his ends. Moreover, by the end of the play, Hamlet himself appears as something of an amateur playwright, a maker, for he devises a piece of "dramatic" clockwork wherein all questions will be answered, all responsibilities as avenger discharged.

But Hamlet fails to give himself adequate credit for the dramatic shape of things at the end. The twentieth-century audience hears an unintended irony in Hamlet's line about the divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will (V.ii.10–11), for the end-shaping deity, "the playwright who wrote the folio of this world," as Stephen Dedalus says in the library scene in *Ulysses,* has given way to *dio boia, deus absconditus,* and simple vacuity on high. With the death of god one looks instead to the artist—a Shakespeare, a Stoppard, even a Hamlet, as suggested above—as maker of order. As Stoppard's Player observes, "There's a design at work in all art" (p. 79).

The prince is not the only character in *Hamlet* whose words or actions hint at the dramatic tendencies or possibilities of life. At the end of the play, in a speech that Stoppard includes, Horatio directs that the bodies of the dead "high on a stage be placed to view" and promises an account

> of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts
> of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> and, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> fallen on the inventors' heads. . . .
> (*Hamlet* V.ii.389–396; *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* p. 126)

In other words, Horatio invites those present to think of recent events as a story or *drama,* and he proposes to begin a narration that will bring his

listeners to the present moment. If one stayed to hear Horatio's account, one would arrive at a point where it would begin again (one thinks of the Beckett title *Comment C'est,* in which to "begin" and "how it is" are paronomasically identical). *Hamlet* becomes *Finnegans Wake,* or for that matter the song at the beginning of the second act of *Waiting for Godot:* as endlessly repeatable narratologically as it is theatrically. In ending the play some lines before the actual funerary gestures with which Shakespeare's version ends, Stoppard counters the desire for some satisfying closure, some ultimate resolution.[17]

In his last line, before joining Rosencrantz and the others in limbo (the limbo, surely, of between-performances), Guildenstern remarks fatuously, "Well, we'll know better next time" (p. 126). The line embraces a triple irony, for its speaker overlooks what he has previously asseverated—the finality of death—at the same time that he reminds the audience that there *will* be a next time (the next performance) and reveals a failure to see that, regardless of the number of "next times," he will not "know better." Guildenstern's remark, like his coin-tossing, contributes to the "estrangement effect," drawing attention to the fact that this is a play, not life. The most effective example of estrangement is in the scene in which Guildenstern lectures the Player on the difference between theatrical death and real death:

> I'm talking about death—and you've never experienced *that*. And you cannot *act* it. You die a thousand casual deaths—with none of that intensity which squeezes out life . . . and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as you die you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after *death*—there is no applause—there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's—*death*— (p. 123)

And with that he knifes the Player who has tormented him. The Player dies horribly—only to get up a few moments later: the murder weapon was a trick knife, a prop, and the Player insists that, however inclined the audience is to accept illusion for reality, it remains illusion. But there are more things in heaven and earth than even the Player dreams of. Stoppard goes beyond the Player's Pirandellian insistence on artistic illusion to insist that the illusion is as valid and as substantial as "reality." Where the Player draws attention to the role of artifice, Stoppard suggests that artifice itself is his subject. He reveals that the play, in its reflexivity, necessarily concerns itself as play before it concerns the "real world."

Thus Stoppard revises the naive theory of art in *Hamlet*. When Guilden-

stern says, "I'd prefer art to mirror life, if it's all the same to you" (p. 81), he echoes Hamlet's famous injunction to the players, long taken as nothing less than a final definition of art as that which holds "the mirror up to nature." But the formula is complicated in the twentieth century, for critics and artists now believe that life actually imitates art as much as the other way around. Indeed, "life" or "nature" has been redefined as something fragmented, indeterminate, and absurd—and art now is expected to "reflect" that fragmentation, indeterminacy, and absurdity. Guildenstern's remark figuratively "mirrors" Hamlet's familiar line at the same time that it ironically invites a "reflection" on the very *idea* of mirroring. He makes the remark while watching the dumbshow that mirrors the play entitled *The Murder of Gonzago,* which in turn mirrors the situation at the royal court of Denmark; the dumbshow also mirrors *Hamlet,* the play in which it appears, as well as *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* which of course *also* mirrors *Hamlet.* In this play of mirrors one sees a prominent thematic feature of Stoppard's play: that texts reflect each other and resist attempts to discover an Ur-text.

One can think of these proliferating mirror images, these specular eidola, as symbionts, and one can look to the ways these mirrorings interact and modify each other for more on the mechanics and significance of symbiosis. Here one sees how symbiosis promotes an understanding of the necessity of multiple viewpoints, multiple realities. Symbionts—even mirror images—are never completely *identical.* My image in the mirror differs from me in that its left is my right. I can think; it cannot. *The Murder of Gonzago,* by the same token, is more than a mirror text, a *mise en abîme,* of *Hamlet.* It serves to advance the plot of *Hamlet,* to cause an action in the frame that is not present in the embedded text. That other mirror text of *Hamlet, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* is also and more obviously the instrument of an evolving action and its evolving meanings.

Stoppard allows the players to become the cast of *Hamlet,* thereby emphasizing the artifice, the idea of shadows representing paradoxically insubstantial substance. But with all these shadows and mirrors, the boundary between reality and illusion becomes difficult to establish or recognize. The mirroring, promoting as it does a typically postmodern replication, forces one to revise naive assumptions about the relationship between art and reality. Art cannot simply hold the mirror up to nature unless it first defines nature as something extremely complex and mysterious, something with its own set of internal mirrors and correspondences. Thus if art mirrors nature, it mirrors a nature defined as containing art, which contains nature, which contains art—and so on, in infinite regression.

The mirrors can also be seen as narratives that complement each other,

from the "framing" *Hamlet* to the "embedded" *Murder of Gonzago*. The symbiotic text, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* can be thought of as mirroring or embedded, too. Tzvetan Todorov, who also favors the mirror metaphor, states that

> embedding is an articulation of the most essential property of all narrative. For the embedding narrative is the *narrative of a narrative*. By telling the story of another narrative, the first narrative achieves its fundamental theme and at the same time is reflected in this image of itself. The embedded narrative is the image of that great abstract narrative of which all the others are merely infinitesimal parts as well as the image of the embedding narrative which directly precedes it. To be the narrative of a narrative is the fate of all narrative which realizes itself through embedding.

Todorov makes the point that in the *Arabian Nights* "every narrative must create new ones—within itself, in order that its characters can go on living, and outside itself, so that the supplement it inevitably produces may be consumed there."[18] By "outside" narratives Todorov means those that translators effect when they make decisions—as they always do—about which stories to include and reject as they produce their versions of the book.

But this inside-outside distinction also applies to *Hamlet,* which has its inside narrative (*The Murder of Gonzago*) and, in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* its outside narrative. These mutually reflecting entities, now embedding, now embedded, promote an end similar to that of narratological embedding, which commonly functions to circumvent the epistemologically one-dimensional tendencies of linear or stable-viewpoint narrative—tendencies that drama, too, evinces. One cannot represent reality without allowing narratologically for reality's multidimensionality; and drama, too, notwithstanding the greater objectivity of its multiple speakers, benefits from the extra dimensions acquired through embedding.

In the past, one seldom wondered where the characters in a play went when they left the stage. They were understood to be about their business—perhaps furthering the plot somewhere in ways that would be made clear in some subsequent scene or scenes. At the same time, one viewed the action of a play like *Hamlet* as a comprehensive account of certain events—events interpretable, moreover, as microcosmic representation of universal truths. One was content to go along with the fiction because it conformed to one's expectations. But in the postmodernist period, one knows that "every exit" in a play, as the Player observes, is "an entrance somewhere else" (p. 28)—

a premise that would later receive its full elaboration in Ayckbourn's *Norman Conquests* and Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*. More seriously, one knows that neither the lesser nor greater fictions should be taken as reality—or rather that all fictions have equal validity, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's world is no less real than Hamlet's.

I began this chapter with a consideration of how Stoppard in effect deconstructs *Hamlet* by developing the implications of its aporias. It seems appropriate to conclude by noting that *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* is also susceptible to deconstructing. One can, as I suggested early on, examine the tension in it between existential Angst and postmodern play, and discover real pain behind the posing. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are immutably doomed to be part of a drama that preordains their death. Yet one of the ironies of the play is that, in exploiting the familiar Renaissance—and especially Shakespearean—metaphor of life as a drama, life as theater, it reveals as chimerical the idea that human lives might unfold according to some consciously produced/divinely authored script. It puts a yet more bitter construction on the conceit developed in a poem by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Sir Walter Raleigh:

> What is our life? a play of passion,
> Our mirth the musicke of diuision;
> Our mothers wombes the tyring houses be,
> Where we are drest for this short Comedy.
> Heauen the Iudicious sharpe spectator is,
> That sits and markes still who doth act amisse,
> Our graues that hide vs from the searching Sun,
> Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done,
> Thus march we playing to our latest rest,
> Onely we die in earnest, that's no Iest.[19]

Stoppard affirms at this point (this changes later in his career) that human beings are not written, at least not by a conscious, purposive author. They are, however, written—and spoken—by culture and by language itself, which at once makes the world and shapes the individual's understanding of it. Language's structuring of reality takes place for the most part outside the consciousness of its users. Humanity must, therefore, perform before an empty hall, and the existential horror of this situation is described by the Player who recalls his anguish at realizing that he and his colleagues were presenting a play to the void. "You don't understand the humiliation of it—to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable—that someone is *watching*" (p. 63).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are also "written" in that they are dramatic characters. They are forever bound in their roles as pathetic or tragicomic sheep and thus doomed by the Player's remark that characters in a play do not "decide" their fate. "It is *written*" (p. 80), and literary convention precludes authorial dispensation of justice along the lines proposed by Miss Prism in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest:* "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." Indeed, says the Player, "there is no *choice* involved. The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means" (p. 80). The Player's words seem ineluctably to refer to the universal fate, as imagined by contemporary humanity, as much as to the fate of characters in tragedy. Thus, ironically, we suffer like characters in tragedy but are denied the stature and the rationale that temper such suffering on the stage. Hamlet and Lear may be gay, but their real-life counterparts are merely miserable. All are actors, and their forte, as the Player observes repeatedly, is dying.

3 PATRIARCHY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Jane Eyre and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not, like *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead,* represent a comprehensive rewriting of the host text—at least it does not at first seem to. From the flourishing literary plant *Jane Eyre* Rhys takes as it were a cutting, which then matures as a related but different plant. Such replication of the host text may or may not involve criticism of it. But the symbiosis here proves especially rich: the guest text is a deconstructive "reading," it dramatizes the historical or diachronic differences between itself and the "mother" text, and it enacts the return of the repressed—or rather the recovery of female experience from the realm of "nonbeing." In its experimentation with narrative and temporal discontinuity, moreover, it exemplifies the instinctive resistance of women's narratives to the phallocentrism of linear time.

When a considerable amount of time (over a century in this instance) separates the host and guest, and when precursor and latecomer differ ideologically, one can look to find discontinuities between the texts that range from minor tensions to full-scale revisionism. Rhys's seizing on "the madwoman in the attic" would seem to be revisionist, for she implies that this character and her story constitute a detail in the host text that sorts oddly with the assumptions behind Jane Eyre's story. As Arnold Davidson has shown, "Jane's ultimate possession (of a fortune, of a family, of Rochester, of a life that fits her rigorous standards of what her life should be) is premised on Antoinette's ultimate dispossession (of her family, of her fortune, of Rochester, of any sense or possibility of directing her own life, of her sanity, of life itself)."[1] How, Rhys seems implicitly to be asking, can what is bad for Bertha be good for Jane? If one dwells on such aporias, such

impasses of ideology and logic, one tends naturally to undermine or "deconstruct" the kind of romantic fantasy encountered in Brontë's novel.

But literary deconstruction and critical deconstruction differ in their conceptual means and ends. Indeed, the deconstructive critic often effects mere destruction in an empty, nihilistic game. The deconstructive tendencies of symbiosis, however, allow new literary work to be produced as they promote a creative displacement of myths, for the guest text's myth routinely displaces or challenges the myth inscribed in the host text. By "myth" here I mean any controlling idea, ideology, or metaphysics. The myth behind many modern texts, for example, is the set of bleak metaphysical assumptions given expression by Joseph Wood Krutch in *The Modern Temper:*

> The universe revealed to us by science, especially the sciences of biology and psychology, is one in which the human spirit cannot find a comfortable home. That spirit breathes freely only in a universe where what philosophers call Value Judgements are of supreme importance. It needs to believe, for instance, that right and wrong are real, that Love is more than a biological function, that the human mind is capable of reason rather than merely of rationalization, and that it has the power to will and to choose instead of being compelled merely to react in the fashion predetermined by its conditioning. Since science has proved that none of these beliefs is more than a delusion, mankind will be compelled either to surrender what we call its humanity by adjusting to the real world or to live some kind of tragic existence in a universe alien to the deepest needs of its nature.[2]

F. Scott Fitzgerald makes the point more simply in the famous line from *This Side of Paradise:* "All Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken. . . ."

Once having effected its iconoclastic work, this modernist myth becomes ripe for displacement, especially inasmuch as it proves metaphysically abhorrent and, like any other myth, aesthetically self-exhausting. Also promoting its demise are some of the new ideas about language that color the thinking of the modernists themselves, including the Stein who experiments with ways to make meaning in language short-circuit, the Hemingway who distrusts abstraction, the Eliot whose description of words slipping and sliding illustrates the free play of the signifier. But as linguistics and philosophy come more and more to define language as an arbitrary system of signifiers that can never close the gap—or even stabilize the relationship—with the signifieds, new aesthetic strategies become desirable to make an art about signification itself and the problematics of

a perennially absconding "transcendental signified." Symbiosis proves one of the most effective of the postmodern strategies for construing language as something other than an epistemological cul-de-sac. Symbiosis at once defeats the absolutist tendencies of twentieth-century metaphysics and affirms as valuable the infinite regression of signifiers; thus the point of the symbiotic guest is not the closer approximation to "truth" or "reality" but the latitude for an infinitely playful replication that redeems art from its own periodic exhaustion.

Not that every contemporary guest text demonstrates an awareness on the part of its author of these postmodernist possibilities. Jean Rhys, the intimate of Ford Madox Ford and other shapers of the dominant literary aesthetic of the early twentieth century, seems content in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to challenge the myth of romantic fulfillment in the text of her predecessor, Charlotte Brontë. Her displacing myth, in its bleakness, is nominally modernist: it expresses a general alienation and a contempt for bourgeois economic and religious hypocrisy. But the realization of this myth through symbiosis is postmodern—as is the undermining and exposing of the merely *structural* myths (the expulsion from Eden, the apocalyptic conclusion to history) around which the story is ordered. Thus *Wide Sargasso Sea* is more than latter-day modernism, more than warmed-over Conrad or Woolf. Its status as symbiont makes it something new, a modernist hybrid that goes beyond signaling the exhaustion of a romantic myth to intimate the exhaustion of its own displacing myth as well.

As symbiotic guest, it also affects the way readers experience its host text, *Jane Eyre*. Dennis Porter has observed that "*Wide Sargasso Sea* pays homage to what modern French critics refer to as 'the plurality' of substantial literary texts by bringing to consciousness some of the hidden implications of *Jane Eyre,* which it develops and challenges."[3] Thus, as Thomas Staley astutely notes, "To re-read *Jane Eyre* after reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a startling experience. . . . *Wide Sargasso Sea* focuses the reader both within and before the spatio-temporal frame of *Jane Eyre;* it amplifies our considerations of character formation within *Jane Eyre* and even tests our sense of enclosure of a narrative text. . . . My point . . . is that there is a more complex process going on for the reader of *Wide Sargasso Sea* involving more than simple recognition of the use of *Jane Eyre* in Rhys's text."[4] In what follows, then, I begin with a consideration of the points of contact between Brontë's novel and Rhys's. This comparison will be followed by a more focused look at *Wide Sargasso Sea,* for symbiosis reveals its dynamics most readily in the greater self-consciousness of the guest author's performance.

Mothers and Daughters

Situated as it is at some temporal distance from its host, *Wide Sargasso Sea* may seem to owe little to its predecessor. As Francis Wyndham observes, the novel "is in no sense a pastiche of Charlotte Brontë and exists in its own right, quite independent of *Jane Eyre*."[5] Louis James points out that one must read closely to discover the traces of the Brontë story; he notes, among other things, that Rhys does not give Antoinette's husband a name and that Brontë's heroine never appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.[6] The name of Rhys's heroine remains unknown until well into the story, and even then she is introduced by a name—Cosway—that does not figure in *Jane Eyre*. A few readers, however, will recognize her adoptive name, Mason, especially when Antoinette's husband insists on calling her "Bertha" instead of Antoinette. Perhaps, too, they will remember that in the Brontë novel Mr. Rochester and his first wife—"Bertha Antoinetta Mason"—were married in Spanish Town, Jamaica. Readers who have missed these hints may not see the connection with one of the great classics of the English novel until the brief concluding section, with Grace Poole and the oneiric conflagration.

Yet even though the host text is virtually the definitive gothic romance, and even though, as Anthony Luengo has pointed out, Rhys retains numerous gothic elements,[7] the author of *Wide Sargasso Sea* carefully forecloses all possibility of the reader's taking Antoinette or her husband as figures of romantic melodrama. She depicts her characters with extraordinary subtlety, breathing a new complexity into most of the figures she appropriates from Brontë's novel. If Richard Mason remains sketchy, Mr. Rochester, "Bertha Mason," and even Grace Poole now join Brontë's eponymous heroine in having their inner lives—and their earlier experiences—recorded. Rhys effects this dialogic expansion by her device of alternating narrators or interior monologues. Thus in part the symbiosis conflates the nineteenth-century Victorian romance with the modern novel of consciousness.

Governing all is the subtle depiction of Antoinette Cosway as a humanized version of Brontë's monstrous Bertha Mason. In Rhys's hands the Creole heiress has much in common with the fiery little governess who becomes Rochester's second wife. "Re-reading Chapters I to X of *Jane Eyre*," remarks Michael Thorpe, "one cannot help but notice how much in them corresponds to Antoinette's essential experience as a solitary, unloved child in Part One of *Wide Sargasso Sea*."[8] Antoinette, like Jane Eyre, begins her story as a neglected but observant child, reduced in circumstances and surrounded by unmerited enmity. Presently an orphan, Antoinette goes to

Mount Calvary Convent School, where she learns lessons in femininity from the de Plana sisters; Jane learns similar lessons from the saintly Helen Burns and the humane Miss Temple at Lowood (a place name inverted in Antoinette's Granbois, which Rochester translates as "high woods").[9] Both girls come into a fortune and "relations," but where Antoinette's fortune makes her the victim of a fortune hunter, Jane's makes her independent enough to approach that same fortune hunter—Rochester—as an equal. Jane's relations, the Rivers family, also enhance her social position. But when "Daniel Cosway," who claims to be Antoinette's mulatto half-brother, announces himself to her husband, the result is altogether different. Daniel succeeds in poisoning Rochester's mind. Antoinette, then, goes from plantation aristocracy to crazed pyromaniac, whereas Jane, applying herself to honorable work, discovering relatives, and inheriting a fortune, proceeds from early privation to marriage, motherhood, and fulfillment.

Antoinette reverses the movement from insecurity to security seen in Jane's life. Antoinette's story, in fact, is that of a life-long obsession with security, a hunger never satisfied except momentarily. The word *safe* recurs constantly in the text. It becomes ironic when Rochester reports that "She'd liked that—to be told 'you are safe.'" But at the same time he reports, "I did not love her" (p. 93). The author heightens the irony and the pathos when, at the end of the novel, Grace Poole reveals that she, too, has long felt insecure. She has accepted employment in Rochester's establishment because his "house is big and safe, a shelter from the world outside which, say what you like, can be a black and cruel world to a woman. . . ." She loves "the thick walls" of Thornfield Hall, "keeping away all the things that you have fought till you can fight no more" (p. 178).

The owner of this house—a prison for one woman, a haven for another—is the major point of contact between the symbiotic texts, both of which present him as a flawed and unhappy man. But where Brontë emphasizes the positive, Rhys emphasizes the negative. One author qualifies her picture of a romantic idol; the other qualifies her picture of a cad. Brontë makes the reader love Rochester's Byronic Weltschmerz while admitting that he can embrace, when it suits him, an ethics of convenience: in attempting to commit bigamy with Jane, he places her in grave danger. Rhys, on the other hand, makes the reader loathe Rochester, though she takes care to qualify her condemnation. One sees his misery as well as Antoinette's, and one hears repeatedly—from Christophine, for example—that he is not a bad man, only money-hungry (like so many in the novel). He is, one concludes, somewhat morally unformed. Courting Antoinette insin-

cerely, he had spoken in a "voice . . . correct but toneless" (p. 77). At Père Lilièvre's house, near Granbois, he is taken for a zombie, and Rhys hints that, morally, at least, all of his class and moral obtuseness are zombies. He is, in a word, blind or nearly blind to the real moral complexity of the world, especially the West Indian world, and this blindness anticipates the literal blindness he suffers at the end of *Jane Eyre*—caused, one recalls, by his attempt to rescue his mad wife from the fire she has set. His faults notwithstanding, Rochester remains immensely appealing in *Jane Eyre,* and only the most captious of readers could be unmoved by the narrator's famous peroration: "Reader, I married him."

But Rhys imagines his first wife as saying, in effect, "Reader, he married *me*—and took my fortune and reduced me to the status of private bedlamite." He even denies her the fundamental dignity of her own name for the patriarchally tendentious reason that she shares it with her mother. The author declines to give him any name at all, perhaps as a kind of revenge for his renaming Antoinette, who at the end remains lucid enough to insist, "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass" (p. 180). She implies that her mental condition was exacerbated by the subtly annihilating denial of something so intrinsic to her identity. And indeed, "Bertha" is a heavy, lumpish name, utterly at odds with the graceful "Antoinette." His own namelessness, at any rate, makes him generic: he is every fortune hunter, every greedy European—in a sense, every man. (The Hebrew for *man,* one recalls, is *Adam,* who also prided himself on the right to give names; but as will be seen in a consideration of the setting's Edenic features, Rhys's Rochester seems ultimately less the Adamic than the demonic figure in this poisoned paradise.)

Rethinking *Jane Eyre* comprehensively, Rhys insists on doing justice to the character that Brontë limns as a pathetic (if not monstrous) figure—one who, with her family, had supposedly lied to and taken advantage of Rochester back in her native Jamaica. At the same time, Rhys depicts a much more negative Rochester than Brontë's. She also revises the romantic vision of female fulfillment with which *Jane Eyre* ends. Rhys explores the socially and economically determined helplessness of her women characters and the unlikelihood of their fulfillment under a patriarchal dispensation.

Yet in limning the full horror of Antoinette's economic victimization (the law gives her fortune to her husband), Rhys merely underscores a detail Brontë knew to be necessary to her heroine's ultimate triumph: Jane Eyre must become financially independent, with a fortune of her own, before she and Rochester can meet as equals and marry. Rhys, then, anticipates

Gilbert and Gubar's thesis that Bertha is symbolically a part of Jane Eyre—a reification or displacement of her rage.[10] Her madness is really a convenient label for women who do not conform to the patriarchal system. Thus at the climax of the story Antoinette steals from her room in a dream and sees the Thornfield ghost: herself in a mirror. Like Jane Eyre she encounters aspects of herself that cannot be integrated. Both women wander halls in the vast edifice of European patriarchalism, occasionally glimpsing its female victims in one kind of mirror or another. As will be seen, the mirror occasionally reveals a black face, at least in *Wide Sargasso Sea,* for the twentieth-century writer knows that colonial populations share the fate of women.

Selves and mirror selves, oppressive fathers, the discontents of civilization. *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* have interesting psychoanalytic components and lend themselves to complementary Freudian and post-Freudian readings. Indeed, to the extent that great artists anticipate the perceptions and insights of the larger society and its thinkers, one can say that Brontë adumbrates the theses of Freud, Rhys those of Lacan and feminist psychoanalysis. One can, moreover, raise questions about the psychoanalytic dimensions of the relationship between a mother-author and a daughter-author, as well as about the specific meanings of their texts. Some of the meanings derivable from classic psychoanalysis and its feminist revisions will be considered in the following paragraphs, and some remarks from a Lacanian perspective will figure in the last part of this chapter.

Jane Eyre has generated considerable psychoanalytic criticism: the ancient trope of the search for the father becomes conflated with the search for the father-husband. According to one psychoanalytic reading, Jane encounters a too obviously paternal figure in Rochester, who even has a wife in the classic Electral pattern.[11] The psychological dynamics of Jane's initial connection with Rochester generate a disturbing effect that owes its power to the incest fantasy being played out. Jane must outgrow her Electral stage, the "mother" must be gotten rid of, and St. John Rivers, prospective husband, must be unmasked as yet another paternal figure. Jane, then, must "come of age" by threading her way among various temptations and, as previously noted, by coming into a small fortune and "relations" that enable her to approach Rochester as an equal. Critics have also noted that Rochester's maiming (he loses the sinistral eye and hand) seems to be some kind of symbolic castration, a punishment oddly transferred away from the one "guilty" of incestuous designs.

The fantasy in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also Oedipal, as one sees in Antoinette's cautious expression of grief at the mother's repeated preference for males—the brother, Mr. Mason, presumably old Cosway. Antoinette's

misery, which begins with her mother's limited attention, is compounded by the separation that follows her mother's mental breakdown. A terrifying visit to this afflicted woman, who is subjected to repeated violation by her keeper and his clients, becomes the novel's primal scene, referred to repeatedly by Antoinette. In her distress, Antoinette is symbolically the child traumatized by knowledge of parental intercourse, taken to be a nocturnal struggle in which the father is thought to be hurting the mother. Like the primal scene, which can be fantasied or literal, the abusive moment witnessed by Antoinette may not be real, for it is recollected—and mentioned repeatedly in the narrative—*after* the account of the mother's death and funeral. Subsequently Christophine becomes the mother, yet one who is enlisted to help in preserving the physical relationship of Antoinette and her husband. This seems like an inchoate attempt to arrive at psychological maturity, but it is doomed. Antoinette remains the child, inadequately cherished by the mother (whose role Christophine, Aunt Cora, Sister Marie Augustine, and Grace Poole assume in succession) and doomed never to resolve her fixation at an Oedipal or Electral stage of libido development.

A psychoanalytic reading ought also to touch on the role of dream and nightmare in the novel. Like Brontë in the much discussed dreams of Jane Eyre, Rhys allows oneiric vision to foreshadow her heroine's fate. As the dust jacket's anonymous commentator remarks, the novel develops from a "dreamlike opening" to a "nightmare climax," and indeed the world of this novel is almost entirely a dreamscape, heightened by Antoinette's account of a literal nightmare that comes to her three times, as in some "grim" fairy tale.[12] The dream marks off the stages—birth, adolescence, maturity—of a life best described, in the novel's last two words, as a "dark passage" (p. 190).

She has the dream first as a child at Coulibri and describes it in a mere four sentences: "I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move" (p. 27). In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* as Gregory Hallidy points out in a brief discussion of this passage, Freud argues that a dream gives symbolic expression to a wish; he also suggests that a dream alludes to events from the day preceding it. Antoinette dreams this dream after her fight with Tia, someone she now thinks hates her. Tia had challenged her to turn a somersault under water, and that immersion in the thalassic element becomes a vague fetal dread in the dream, which expresses Antoinette's wish never to have been born. The footsteps the dreamer hears are the heartbeats—in labor—of another person who seems at times to hate her:

her mother. The dreamer's inability to move, struggle however she might, is also fetal. She awakes on the floor, crying, swaddled in blankets, looking up at her mother: a newborn.[13]

The dream recurs at the convent, and Antoinette, now seventeen, gives a more detailed account of it, enough to suggest that it now concerns pubescent sexual anxieties. In the dream she is in or going into a nocturnal forest in the company of what, formerly a baleful "someone," is now a man who hates her. Both night and forest are ancient symbols of error, perhaps specifically carnal error, and the dreamer fatalistically accepts the besmirching of her dress (white like her mother's muslin, or like the one that will move Rochester to desire on his first honeymoon). The forest gives way to a walled garden, another archetypal symbol—this time of woman and the body of woman. Here there are steps going up, and the dreamer knows that "it" will happen when she mounts the steps, for the traversing of staircases—again the authority is Freud—symbolizes sexual intercourse. At the top she stumbles—that is, she "falls" and embraces a strangely animated tree trunk that "sways and jerks" (p. 61). Four times in the brief recitation of the dream there are queries and remarks about location: "Here?," "Not here," "Here, here," "Here, in here" (pp. 60–61). In this detail the dreamer reveals her ignorance of sexual geography and fearfully anticipates the awkwardness of first intercourse.[14] The dream ends in phallic quiescence as "the tree stopped swaying and jerking" (p. 61).

The dream recurs for the last time in Antoinette's room at Thornfield, where it prefigures the fiery end of that pile and its most miserable tenant. Now that the dreamer is a mature woman, a neglected and despised wife, the dream is revealed as prophetic of her fate: the sexual staircase was always the one leading to the attic room at Thornfield.[15] But now the dream features more detail and includes visions of burning both figurative (the red dress) and literal (setting fire to her prison) that give expression to sexual frustration and neglect, as well as to a need to destroy what has destroyed her. The house is also a bodily metaphor, a projection of Antoinette herself, from the prisonlike cranium with its embattled ego and its caretaker censor or superego to the fiery maw where vengeance takes shape—the room with red draperies that ironically recalls the "red room" in which Jane Eyre, as a child, is punished by Mrs. Reed.

But to adduce only Freud here is to perpetuate the female bondage to linear, masculine, patriarchal thinking that texts like *Wide Sargasso Sea* exist to challenge. In other words, many feminists see in Freud (and even in Lacan) only Rochester as psychoanalyst. Indeed, Rhys's Rochester bears some resemblance to the physician husband who misreads and miscon-

strues his neurasthenic wife's every symptom in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." What Annette Kolodny says of that fiction applies to Rhys's novel as well: the heroine "comes more and more to experience herself as a text which can neither get read nor recorded," so that the story as a whole becomes "an exploration, within itself, of the gender-inflected interpretive strategies responsible for our mutual misreadings, and even horrific misprisions, across sex lines."[16]

Within sex lines, on the other hand, both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* offer several mother-daughter relationships. In the host text there are Jane and her dead mother, Jane and the cruel Mrs. Reed, Jane and her friends at Lowood, Jane and the women in Rochester's life (she interacts Electrally with both Blanche Ingram and Bertha Rochester). In the guest text much is made of the relationship between Antoinette and her mother as well as the relationships between Antoinette and the surrogate mothers already noted: Christophine, Aunt Cora, Sister Marie Augustine, and Grace Poole. The mature Jane moves toward a comfortable sibling relationship with other grown women (her cousins Diana and Mary Rivers) and a conjugal relationship with Rochester. Antoinette, by contrast, gives the lie to the cosy pattern of Freudian resolution of Oedipal difficulties. She loses her mother first to male rivals, then to madness, finally to death. She marries an adult version of Jane Eyre's nasty little cousin, John Reed.

From the point of view of feminist psychoanalysis, Antoinette struggles throughout her life to escape the tyranny of the phallocentric Symbolic Order, to recover what Kristeva calls the "semiotic" relationship with the mother[17] that predates the encounter with the terrible father, the Law, the *nom du père*. Rhys's narrative technique seconds this struggle: with its general disregard for linear chronology, its dreamlike weave of past and vaguely defined present, it exemplifies writing of the kind that feminist critics like Cixous and Kristeva celebrate as subversive of logocentric order and logic. Though Rhys never becomes a "laughing Medusa," her narrative is calculated to challenge what Cixous calls the "marital-conjugal subjective economy" and thus to undermine the reasoned, inflexible symmetries of phallocentrism, "to blow up the Law."[18] In Antoinette the repressed returns, speaks, and eventually takes violent action against the culture of the patriarchs—against the Rochester who invokes "law and order" (p. 160) and against the Richard Mason who declares that he "cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband." "It was when he said 'legally,'" says Grace Poole, "that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand you bit him" (p. 184).[19]

As Cixous says, "when the 'repressed' of their culture and their society

returns, it's an explosive, *utterly* destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions." Indeed, Rhys treats this violent abreaction twice over. In that she balances the burning of Coulibri by the colonized and that of Thornfield by Antoinette ("colonized" by the phallus), she suggests the scale of patriarchal oppression—and its consequences—in terms of race, history, and economics, as well as gender. In hinting that what is done to Antoinette connects with the colonial cupidity of Europeans ("Gold is the idol they worship," p. 188), Rhys anticipates the association, by Cixous, of "gynocide" and the exploitation of "the colonized peoples of yesterday, the workers, the nations, the species off whose backs the history of men has made its gold."[20]

Does Rhys challenge or complement the literary mother in this revision of the maternal text? According to Bloom, the relationship between the "ephebe" (I have previously noted the androcentrism of the term) and the literary "precursor" is one of Oedipal rivalry and hostility. But perhaps between women writers such rivalry takes less overt forms than that between fathers and sons. Perhaps, as some feminists argue, women have the option of recovering a primal oneness with the mother that delivers them from the castrative, patriarchal crises attending their entry into the Symbolic Order. If so, if Brontë is a nurturing mother or ally rather than a rival to be exposed, shown up, or bested, Rhys does not "misread" or deconstruct her so much as she looks in the Brontë text for traces of a pre-logocentric discourse, a Kristevan "*chora*" or "semiotic," a common ground of pre-Oedipal exemption from the Symbolic Order. She effects a kinder, gentler deconstruction.

Ambiguity, Paradox, History

The title of the Rhys novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* refers to the opening line of Pound's sardonic "Portrait d'une Femme": "Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea." The Sargasso Sea is a region in the North Atlantic infested with seaweed (sargassum). The novel's New World focus resonates with the fact that Columbus traversed this region on his exploratory voyage to the New World. According to legend, the seaweed was so thick that ships could become hopelessly mired in it, and thus the Sargasso Sea was thought to contain the treasure and the detritus of whole civilizations. The relevance of the legend to Rhys's novel is obvious: Antoinette is entangled in the Sargasso Sea of an extremely limited social and familial sphere, a polluted gene pool (that of the Indies, where the Creoles have interbred for too many generations), economic discrimination against women, and the ordinary complications of a mercenary marriage. The reader alive to the

legends behind this body of water will know in advance that any novel so entitled will be a story of paralysis, the story of a Cassandra or female Laocoön. But this sea is also *wide,* and it entangles not only women but also others reduced to serfdom and peonage. Indeed, it eventually entangles their sexual or colonial masters as well.

Readers too may become entangled, as one can see by tracing the progression of one's responses to the novel's opening paragraph. Here Antoinette introduces herself and her family as alien, outcast even among their fellow Creoles:

> They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were never in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said. (p. 17)

Christophine's observation is typical of the way the novel at once keeps the reader off balance and renders the complexity of this Caribbean world, along with that of its central figure, the narrator of its first and last parts. Who, the reader wonders, is Christophine? How does she feel about the Jamaican ladies? Does she counter their disparagement? Second it? Report it neutrally? Or are Christophine's words complimentary—is she merely accounting for the Jamaican ladies' contumely as envy? And why are Christophine's cryptic words embedded in other discourses?

On first encounter Christophine's phrase—"she pretty like pretty self"—seems to refer to a kind of self-regard, at once vain, narcissistic, and vaguely pathological. Yet the phrase hints, too, at an attractive self-containment, as one might say, "She pretty much likes her own pretty self," implying something of the approbation behind, say, "Handsome is as handsome does." Only after the "self" locution recurs later in the narrative—and after one understands Christophine's loyalty to the narrator's family—does the phrase in the first paragraph become clear. It is echoed, for example, in Christophine's remark about Rochester's cupidity: "'Your husband certainly love money,' she said. 'That is no lie. Money have pretty face for everybody, but for that man money pretty like pretty self, he can't see nothing else'" (p. 114). Later she tells Rochester: "You wicked like Satan self!" (p. 161). This can only mean "like Satan himself," and so the previous constructions are seen to mean that Antoinette's mother is "pretty like prettiness itself" and that Rochester views money as of a similarly essential and self-justifying beauty. Of course beauty *is* absolute, equatable with Truth, even, in the familiar Keatsian formula. On the other hand, to view money—the love for which is proverbially the root of all evil—in such

terms is classically aberrant. In all of these observations, as in the actions she takes to defend Antoinette, Christophine reveals herself as the moral center of the novel, disinclined to hate other women, whatever the color of their skins, and healthily dubious about pelf no less than self.

But the most significant aspect here is the ambiguity of that opening paragraph, one's first experience of the language of this novel, which opens in dialogic profusion as a native English speaker renders an account, partially in dialect, of the judgments of "the Jamaican ladies." In the novel's first thirty-seven words one distinguishes at least four different discourses: one hears the language of Antoinette, that of the Jamaican ladies, that of Christophine, that of Rhys—and perhaps even that of Antoinette's mother, with whom the heroine identifies. As the narrative continues, it settles more firmly into the accents of a pair of native English speakers, but this more familiar language eventually delivers more ambiguity and paradox: the ambiguity of Antoinette's mental state (not to mention that of her mother and brother); the paradox of the reader's sense that Antoinette's madness, as it becomes unmistakable, never justifies her husband's treatment of her; and the paradox of an Eden become infernal through greed, inbreeding, and the slavery that, from the perspective of the slave owners and their descendants, created a paradise. The heteroglossic multiplicity of the opening, along with the multiple complexities of the story that follows, makes the reader a momentary Rochester, baffled, put off, and liable, perhaps, to something like Rochester's recoil from and hasty judgment of this West Indian milieu. Rhys, in other words, forces readers into a recognition of their own status as "outsiders"—outsiders vis-à-vis the text and outsiders vis-à-vis this West Indian world. Ultimately readers will be confronted with their own involvement and complicity in a social and political system that constitutes collective cultural Rochesterism.

One ought to remember that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an *historical* novel, and indeed its reflection of West Indian and European history is at once sophisticated and subtle. But for an historical novel it gives the reader at first relatively little sense of "period." The tapestry of rich colonials, resentful natives, and spiritual corruption could almost be from a contemporary setting by Graham Greene. The reader misses much of the historical novel's traditional machinery. But one gradually comes to realize that the historical moment, though rendered with economy, has also been rendered with great care and resourcefulness. Historical novels, broadly speaking, can do several things—sometimes all at once. They can reflect the past with thoroughgoing verisimilitude; they can capture a "turning point" in the past, when, say, the present or some prominent feature of the present jells;

and they can reflect the present like a "distant mirror," perhaps with a kind of broadly allegorizing tendency. Rhys's novel seems to typify the second and third of these categories: she sketches the moment in modern history when slavery ended, at the same time inviting a reflection on the possibility that exploitation of the weak by the strong has merely changed its outward appearances and justifications in the last century and a half. The novel was written in the age of Marcuse, during the period when the British empire was being dismantled and when wars of national liberation, notably in Algeria and Indochina, coincided with the birth of the civil rights and women's liberation movements in America.

Rhys, however, does take pains to situate her action precisely in time, and she sacrifices a point of congruence with the host text to get the dating she wants. Her historical precision suggests that the subjection of "Bertha" and the problematic emancipation of slaves in British territories are somehow of a piece, for both the slaves and the woman are being "had." Brontë's Rochester marries Bertha Mason fifteen years before his attempted bigamy with Jane Eyre—an action that takes place in approximately 1808 (Scott's *Marmion* is published while Jane is in Morton); Rochester and Bertha, then, must have been married in 1793—long before the emancipation of the slaves. Rhys imagines this marriage as *following* the emancipation. The one date in Rhys's story is 1839, with which Antoinette signs the cross-stitching she does at Mount Calvary Convent in her seventeenth year. As Kathy Mezei has noted, this would seem to be "present time" in part one of the novel, the vantage from which Antoinette recollects the five years of poverty at Coulibri between the death of her father and her mother's remarriage to Mr. Mason.[21] The novel opens with Antoinette's recollections of this earlier period: "They say when trouble comes close ranks." Her recollections seem to go back to 1834 or perhaps even to 1833, the date of the Emancipation Act, which she mentions in passing. The Emancipation Act provided compensation for slaveholders and emancipation of their human property after a seven-year apprenticeship period. Antoinette's observations of fractious ex-slaves at Coulibri give the reader a child's-eye view of the first part of the emancipation process. The seven-year apprenticeship was subsequently reduced to five, so that 1838—the year immediately preceding the fire at Coulibri, Antoinette's wounding, her mother's madness, and the enrollment at the convent school—marks the true end of slavery in the British West Indies.

But not of colonialism, which Rhys dissects as brilliantly as does Conrad —or Gillo Pontecorvo, whose film *Burn* concerns the tragic course of colonialism and revolution on an imaginary Caribbean island. Much of the

horror encountered in this novel has its roots in European institutions designed to consolidate private fortunes and, more broadly, to promote imperial ends. Racism and slavery, ethnocentrism and colonial lust, the perquisites of primogeniture, the economic and political disenfranchisement of women—all are shown as leaving a legacy of corruption at every level. Antoinette's relations with her black servants, retainers, and neighbors reveal a tangled web of love, envy, hatred, loyalty, and other emotions and feelings that one would expect to find mutually contradictory or exclusive. But Antoinette's turning to obeah (magic) suggests a fellowship of the oppressed. Witchcraft, historically the refuge of the powerless and uneducated, represents a crude resistance to patriarchal oppression. Indeed, the merely insane have often found themselves charged with witchcraft. To depict Antoinette, at the point of a breakdown, as turning to witchcraft is a brilliant stroke on Rhys's part. It furthers the reader's gradual recognition of a set of parallels between women and the colonized. Both begin in a kind of comprehensive subjection, and both have come to enjoy a measure of freedom that is paradoxically also the measure of powerlessness. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a *Gone With the Wind* in which Scarlett is one of the niggers. Thus Antoinette is on one occasion forced to exchange clothes with Tia, her black playmate. When she confronts Tia for the last time, she has the curious sensation of looking into a mirror, and indeed Tia's name ("aunt") hints that she is an intimate relation. Having set fire to Thornfield in her last dream, Antoinette will imagine that she sees Tia from the parapet at Thornfield—"Fires always lit for her" (p. 23)—just before her fatal plunge. Thus "Bertha Rochester" sets fire to Thornfield Hall, just as Coulibri's former slaves set fire to the Cosway mansion many years earlier.

The Mirror and the Myth

The recognition of Tia as the reflection in Antoinette's glass is part of an especially prominent pattern of mirror imagery in the book—a pattern that functions even in minutiae. Antoinette's habit of holding her wrist, for example, is mentioned twice: once she holds her left wrist, once the right, as if to hint at specular reversal. The novel's mirror conceit extends also to mirroring actions and characters. Thus Rhys's heroine ends her story as a prisoner and madwoman with a male and female keeper, precisely as had her mother. Her mother's verbal resources at the end are reduced to "*Qui est là? Qui est là?*"—the signature of Coco, the parrot that plummets horribly from the *glacis* at Coulibri just as Antoinette, whose wings have also (at least figuratively) been clipped, will plummet from the ramparts

of Thornfield. The burning of Coulibri, as suggested above, will find its mirror image in the burning of Thornfield, for the novelist suggests that the colonial paternalism responsible for the first cataclysm is the mirror image of the patriarchalism that obtains within Western society and robs Antoinette and other women of their autonomy. In these mirroring conflagrations, moreover, one glimpses a mythic dimension that complements the novel's historical dimension. Ultimately the novel as a whole is at once a mirror of *Jane Eyre* and, on a grander scale, a *speculum mundi,* a mirror in which Western readers can see themselves and their civilization.

Indeed, the specular congruence extends even to heroine and author, for fiction, after all, is a mirror symbiont of life. The reader of Rhys's unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please,* discovers that the author gives the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea* many of her own experiences and attributes, including the West Indian background, the alpine retreat on Dominica, a horse named Preston, education at a convent school, and uneasy relations with blacks. Like Antoinette when Coulibri is burned, Rhys recalls being gotten up in the middle of the night and prepared to flee rioting blacks. In real life Coulibri was Geneva, the estate of Rhys's great-grandfather, put to the torch by angry ex-slaves in the 1830s. Finally Rhys, like Antoinette, struggled with the tacit expectation that "a girl was supposed to marry, it was your mission in life, you were a failure if you didn't."[22] Having found this West Indian world profoundly formative, Rhys intimates a mirror identity between the heroine of her novel and its setting. There is, traditionally, a symbolic connection between woman and landscape, and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the landscape and the heroine are symbolically congruent—both beautiful, both filled with promise, both troubled, both doomed to suffer at the hands of European rapacity.

From scene to scene in the novel the mirror also functions as a symbolically fluid signifier—a signifier never linked to a single signified. One of the more curious mirror references in the novel is in the story Antoinette tells Rochester about waking up one night and seeing two rats on her window sill; she also sees herself in the mirror, watching the rats. The point of the story is not, as Rochester supposes, that she was frightened, for she goes back to sleep without anxiety. But she wakes again and the rats are not there—and now she is frightened indeed. This story may go to the heart of the mirror imagery in the novel. It reminds us that what can be seen—rats on a window sill—is far less terrifying than what cannot be seen: rats that are out of sight, ill will nursed in the secret bosom, the evil at the heart of things.

The mirror is an ancient symbol of the self and of self-knowledge.

Antoinette is denied a mirror at the convent school and at Thornfield because a patriarchal order, both religious and social, seeks actively to discourage self-knowledge among women, to stigmatize gazing into the mirror as vanity. Mirrors proverbially tell the truth, however painful. Antoinette's mother, her youth waning, "had to hope every time she passed a looking glass" (p. 18). Neglectful of her daughter, she at times reminds one of Snow White's vain stepmother, who was given to asking her looking glass, "Who is the fairest of us all?" Antoinette, an up-to-date version of the abused stepdaughter, resembles Anne Sexton's Snow White, who marries the prince and holds court—"sometimes referring to her mirror / as women do."[23] Both Antoinette and her mother have a fondness for the looking glass, but the daughter will fail to realize that the ghost she sees at Thornfield Hall is herself in a mirror.

As both Ronnie Scharfman and Nancy Harrison have suggested, the mirror imagery in the novel also lends itself to Lacanian analysis, whether of the structure of Antoinette's fragile ego as it develops in various mirrors or of the entire novel's "mirroring" structures of repetition and desire.[24] Lacan relies on the image of the mirror in developing a theory of the self.[25] He relies on structures of repetition as the key to psychological narrative. According to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in infant ego development, an infant seeing itself in a mirror is an emblem of the primal psychological state, in which self—the "I"—is shaped not by language or concrete exterior reality, but only by an illusory image (as in a mirror) that victimizes the inchoate self with the *illusion* of its identity with an other. With the birth of language (Lacan's Symbolic Order) and the painful encounter with the Law (Freud's terrible father, the Oedipal complication) comes recognition of the discreteness of the other, along with a lifelong frustrated desire to restore the illusion of identity between self and other.

What Antoinette desires is, in Lacanian terms, what cannot be recovered: neither the pre-Oedipal realm of the Imaginary (as Lacan calls it) where self and other (the mother's body, the image in the mirror) are identical, nor the realm that language separates us from (for language is a system of signifiers, which imply "lack," absence of the thing itself, the signified in the impenetrable realm of the Real). What cannot be recovered is on the one hand a pre-Oedipal or "imaginary" relationship with the mother / other and, on the other hand, the prelapsarian world of Coulibri before emancipation. These losses are universal and archetypal, and Antoinette is the human being in isolation and in the aggregate, banished from a personal imaginary projected culturally as Eden.

The reader, then, encounters a curious marshaling of space and time in

this novel. Space—or rather place—is rendered with great attention to detail and atmosphere and from a double perspective: the setting is paradisal yet oppressive, a creepy Eden after the fall. The author evokes time from a complementary double perspective: a curiously Edenic timelessness seems to coexist with a sense of perpetual decay. It is the timelessness of hell as much as of Eden.

The traditional association of woman and landscape, as well as woman and walled garden, has already been noted, and in the evocation of Coulibri and its mythic garden one sees these topoi brought together. The name Coulibri is especially rich; though it derives presumably from Italian *colibri,* a hummingbird, its spelling hints at a cruel pun (cruel, that is, for the slaves and ex-slaves) on French *cou libre,* the yokeless neck of proud freedom. Coulibri is also a corruption of Culebra, a place name often encountered in the Caribbean (there are, for example, a Culebra Island off Puerto Rico and, in Panama, a Culebra railroad station on the west side of Gaillard Cut. The word *culebra* hints, moreover, at a mythic affinity between woman and serpent. In Spanish it means "snake" but is also slang for "a cunning, sagacious woman," a daughter of Eve like Antoinette Cosway or her mother.

"Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had grown wild," remarks Antoinette, who then adds, "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery—why should *anybody* work?" (p. 19). Antoinette, intimating that slavery created a paradise, equates emancipation with the Fall and even reports on the sighting of a "six-foot snake curled up on the privy seat" (p. 29). When Coulibri burns, the narrator weeps that "nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's Daughter" (p. 45). She worries later that the wound caused by a rock thrown by Tia will leave "a mark on my forehead" (p. 47)—the Mark of Cain, as it were.

Though Antoinette always maintains that Coulibri "was a sacred place. . . . sacred to the sun!" (p. 133), the author allows the reader to see that the paradise of the West Indies fell from the first colonization, the first extermination of native inhabitants, the first introduction of African slaves. There is some justice in intimating that even an Antoinette Cosway might properly bear the mark of Cain for the depredations of her class and her civilization. Rhys had read Milton in her years in Dominica, and like him she weaves the myth of Pluto's rape of Persephone into her tale of paradise lost. When chthonic Rochester bears the thoughtless maid off to everlasting darkness, he becomes a local satanic avatar, fulfillment of the hideous

augury of the serpent on the privy seat—or of the aged servant Godfrey's remark: "The devil prince of this world" (p. 19). Indeed, both Christophine and Grace Poole associate Rochester with Satan.

As a tale of paradise lost, moreover, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a tale of the sins of the fathers visited on the heads of the children, black and white, male and female, who follow them. Antoinette's pilgrimage resembles the collective postlapsarian decline of humanity. Her life, which begins with expulsion from a garden with a Tree of Life, continues through increasingly desperate conditions until she dwells in a kind of hell on the third floor of Thornfield Hall. In the end, the flames take her in the cataclysm that is the archetypal fulfillment of what began with the expulsion from Coulibri. At Coulibri the unhappy exiles look back at their erstwhile home while thronged about by hostile faces. In Milton, Adam and Eve look back and see "the gate / With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms" (*Paradise Lost* 12.643–44). Milton also mentions the "flaming brand" that bars their return, a detail echoed in the appearance of the parrot, Coco, afire on the railing of the *glacis*.

Dreaming herself on the flame-engulfed parapet of Thornfield, Antoinette will see all that had been consumed at Coulibri, a catalogue of her life in Eden:

> I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and the books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* (pp. 189–90)

The story that has begun with the loss of Eden ends with Apocalypse. The fiery end of Thornfield, with its toppling towers and the once angelic Antoinette plummeting from on high, is an earnest of the promised end. But this symbolism has nothing to do with Christian piety. Antoinette is a sacrifice on the altar of sexism and colonialism, the altar at once of Mammon and Moloch. In the red room at Thornfield, she says, "I looked round for an altar for with so many candles and so much red, the room reminded me of a church. Then I heard a clock ticking and it was made of gold. Gold is the idol they worship" (p. 188). Rebelling, she brings the temple down.

This symbolism burlesques the familiar theological history from Genesis to Revelation, revealing the primal cataclysm at Coulibri as the very type and emblem of a similar violence that must sooner or later reach the father-

masters in Europe. Rhys suggests that patriarchalism in society (founded on the phallocentric pretensions of Christianity, where supreme authority rests with the Father, the divine Spouse) will breed its own secular apocalypse—not the ultimate revelation of divine justice but merely the self-destructive rage of the oppressed, the other, the object. The torching of Thornfield recapitulates and refocuses a local but mythic cataclysm engendered by the colonial paternalism that is patriarchalism's face in the third world. At Thornfield as at Coulibri the repressed returns, and the abreaction destroys not only a vicious and debased culture but the innocent individuals who are its inheritors.

As symbiont, then, *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives voice to an *epistemé* that differs from the one inscribed in the host text, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[26] One must keep in mind that the one novel is contemporaneous, the other historical, and one must ponder the dynamics of historicity and contemporaneity. One might expect that the more recent novelist means iconoclastically to attack certain fictions embraced by her predecessor. But perhaps one could more accurately say that Rhys, like a proleptic Gilbert and Gubar, has read Brontë the way recent feminist critics have. She gives fuller expression to what is encoded in Brontë's text: anger at the victimization of women. Rhys's novel, at once the product and the expression of its age, protests oppression, especially that of women. It does so by challenging the narrowly defined version of female desire that characterizes traditional readings of *Jane Eyre*. As guest, it throws into relief the contrast between a product of literary romanticism (with its valuation of emotional intensity, its gothicism, its cult of the individual, and its erotic idealism) and a product of the late twentieth century with its own paradoxical blend of nihilism and fierce commitment to ideals of social justice.

4 PROLEPTIC PARODY

Pale Fire

Medieval philosophers explained mortality as the result of an imbalance in the elemental composition of an organism. Hence the line in Donne's "The Good-Morrow":

Whatever dies was not mixed equally.

Perhaps the unequal mixing of elements in symbiosis might also prove fatal—the too-successful guest discovering itself a parasite after all. But one can imagine an example of symbiosis in which, the elements mixed equally, host and guest depend absolutely on each other. Such an example exists in Nabokov's *Pale Fire,* which unfolds as a kind of symbiotic encyclopedia. Here host and guest coexist within a single book, and here one encounters the phenomenon of literary symbiosis in near-perfect, laboratory conditions. Readers of Nabokov's novel see the complete declension of literary symbiosis from its most attenuated form, allusion, to the predilection for mirror imagery and the problematic relationship with parody. They encounter Oedipal dynamics, too, and they see the guest text as deconstructive "reading" of the host text. My discussion of *Pale Fire* will touch on all of these elements of symbiosis, with special attention to the parodic features that complicate the deconstructive reading of host by guest. The guest in this instance, Kinbote's commentary, attaches itself not only to a conventional host (John Shade's poem) but also to a shadow host: the literary criticism being parodied. One can characterize the technique here as, in David Rampton's phrase, "anticipatory parody." According to Rampton, *Pale Fire* "vindicates its claim as a credible parody of the scholar-critic

by some of the responses it generated."[1] But Nabokov goes further, even, than this, for he effects the proleptic parody of a critical methodology not yet in vogue. As Kinbote deconstructs Shade, the reader deconstructs Kinbote. The author stages a deconstruction, so to speak, of deconstruction.

The ostensible target of the parody is the critical editing and annotating of a literary text—an activity that, concurrently with the work on *Pale Fire,* Nabokov himself was engaged in as the translator and editor of Pushkin.[2] The parody hits its mark, for academic criticism has certainly produced its share of analysts and annotators who routinely proffer the egregious error or gratuitous gloss by way of "research." The failure to understand the joke on "Chapman's Homer,"[3] the assertion that Wordsworth is one of the "masters of the heroic couplet" (p. 82), and of course the inability to discover the source of Shade's title all have their real-life counterparts in the "reader's guide" that mistranslates the foreign word or phrase—or solemnly annotates Beethoven as "a German composer." Yet *Pale Fire* is a better parody today than when it was first published: just as postmodernist art like Nabokov's has hastened the establishment of its poststructuralist critical complement, so does *Pale Fire* conjure its own more worthy critical target. This is a happy development, inasmuch as the exposure of academic criticism's puerility originally seemed a little overdetermined, the heavy artillery of satire trained on the inconsequential redoubt of the annotator.[4]

Bakhtin makes the familiar point that "parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy an essential place in the novel." As a result, he adds, other genres "become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)."[5] Parodic and self-parodic novels like Nabokov's have done their part to shape the "genres and styles" of contemporary literary criticism, with its deconstructive disinclination to draw conclusions, its playfulness, and its new relationship with the reality no longer imagined as representable accurately in language. In *Pale Fire,* however, one encounters wonderful ambiguities regarding the very theories this novel helped to call into being.

In what follows, I shall explore some of the ways in which *Pale Fire* demonstrates the validity and exemplifies the ubiquity of literary symbiosis. In the first part, Nabokov's allusiveness will be considered as a kind of inchoate symbiosis. In the second part, I shall examine the natural prominence, in this symbiotic textbook, of Oedipal dynamics and mirror symbolism.

The third and concluding part will concern how deconstructive symbiosis relates to the funhouse aesthetics of postmodernism. I argue throughout that Nabokov invokes the full range of symbiosis, from allusion to appropriation, to demonstrate certain intertextual and deconstructive precepts: (1) symbiotic recycling "makes it new," allowing creation of fresh literary work, (2) Ur-texts are perennially indeterminable, and (3) the supplement always proves integral.

"Opalescent Light": Allusion and Theft

In *Pale Fire,* ostensibly a literary text and a critical commentary on that text, the reader encounters a fertile and original mind parsing the mechanics of literary proliferation. As Robert Alter remarks, "*Pale Fire* is in part about how literature reuses literature, assimilates it and makes something new and strange out of it."[6] Though Kinbote mentions an ill-wisher who describes him as a botfly and parasite (p. 172), Marilyn Edelstein rightly calls "the relationship between Shade and Kinbote . . . more symbiotic than parasitic."[7] The reader of Nabokov's novel views a kind of literary mitosis, the splitting of one text into two as poem begets commentary and both metamorphose into complementary fictions. Yet the whole proves greater than the sum of its parts. Both Shade and Kinbote produce highly allusive texts, and this wealth of reference to antecedent literature is crucial to the synergy.

Before addressing the question of why this should be so, before considering just how allusion in *Pale Fire* illuminates symbiosis, I should like to gauge the breadth of literary reference here. A brief, descriptive catalogue of allusion will, among other things, demonstrate the extent of Nabokov's playfulness at the same time that it will generate some worthwhile questions about the point of such allusive density. Readers who, in making their way through the following paragraphs, find themselves wondering about *my* point should ask themselves if, in making their way through *Pale Fire* itself, they do not wonder at the respective weighting, in this author's works, of play (easily ninety percent) and serious reflection on or criticism of life. Nabokov forces his critics to forego some of their neat strategies. He even forces them to make analytic sense—and modest analytic sense, at that—only after full engagement with his games. In probing Nabokov's practice here, one would do well to remember that, as Carmela Perri points out, the "etymological origin of 'allusion' is the Latin *allūdere,* to joke, jest, mock, or play with."[8]

The sources of Shade's echoes and allusions include Browning, Donne, Marvell, Goethe, Shakespeare, Eliot, Goldsmith, Tennyson, Shelley, Crashaw—and especially Pope, Wordsworth, and Frost. These, as Priscilla Meyer has shown, are only the obvious ones,[9] and Jeats Cohen notes that the phrase "pale fire," though originating in Shakespeare, figures also in Donne, Dryden, Blake, Shelley, Yeats, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Buchan, and Ray Bradbury.[10] One sees the first of Shade's literary debts in the artful antithesis and balance of the lines, which reveal the presence of his favorite poet, Pope:

> Of what, he said, were mainly growing pains,
> The wonder lingers and the shame remains. (ll. 165–66)
> . . . . . .
> The pen stops in mid-air, then swoops to bar
> A canceled sunset or restore a star. (ll. 849–50)

By the same token, as Andrew Field and others have noted, the "there was a time" formula (l. 167) and the description of mystical transcendence in youth, now lost in maturity, are obvious "thefts" from the Wordsworth of "Tintern Abbey," the Immortality Ode, and *The Prelude*—as is naming the college town New Wye (it was on a walking tour of the Wye River valley that Wordsworth composed "Tintern Abbey").[11] Shade may really have had his vision of the fountain of white light, finally, but the image has its antecedent in Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, as Meyer points out,[12] and in Shelley's pastoral elegy *Adonais,* as well as in his sources: Plotinus and the other Neoplatonists.

The elegiac echoes and the theme of death encourage the reader to recognize that poems about death reflect other poems about death and that the elegy is a highly conventional or reflective or allusive form. Shade's poem is at once a personal elegy—for his daughter, for himself—and a more generalized meditation on "the Worm" (l. 506). Thus it calls to mind Ben Jonson's poems on the deaths of his children as well as the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" and "Thanatopsis," not to mention such specific elegies as Milton's *Lycidas,* Tennyson's *In Memoriam,* and, as already noted, Shelley's *Adonais.* More obliquely, in the references to Sybil Shade's translations of poetry, it touches on Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" and Marvell's "The Nymph on the Death of her Fawn." Donne's assertion that Death answers to the beck of "kings and desperate men" interests Shade's editor, who fits into both categories. As for the Marvell poem, Nabokov invites one to recall the poet's intimations that the fawn is divine, its death

sacramental (one recalls, too, how critics insist on worrying this poem into allegory, subjecting it often to the same kind of indignity that Shade's poem must suffer).

One could go on annotating Shade's conventional or generic echoes. But *Pale Fire,* given its dyslogistic portrait of the critic, reduces the desire of the annotator (*this* annotator, at any rate) for comprehensiveness. What, though, of the author who produces the symbiotic text here? Is Kinbote, too, allusive? On his own or as Nabokov's puppet? The answer is that Kinbote, like Shade, wonders about death, and Kinbote, too, writes allusively. At times, for example, he sounds like the Plato (little admired by Nabokov) who left such a lively record of that other academic and sage, Socrates. More obviously, he resembles Dr. Johnson's biographer, the Boswell who so often reveals his own silliness. But the most important of these literary affinities emerges in Kinbote's interest in death, an interest that goes beyond responding to its presence in the poem he is annotating. He repeatedly characterizes New Wye and Appalachia as Arcady and reminds his readers of the conventional intrusion into the pastoral landscape: "Even in Arcady am I, says Death" (p. 174). As he courts recognition that he is the disguised King Charles of Zembla, Kinbote admits suggestively that his pseudonym is Zemblan for regicide. He also hints that Kinbote is in fact an anagram of the real name Botkin (p. 267). The name, Kinbote observes, means one who makes "bottekins, fancy footwear" (p. 100), which suggests an affinity with that earlier mad monarch, Caligula, whose name means "little boots." But a bodkin is also the weapon of Pope's Belinda—and the instrument of Hamlet's hypothetical suicide. Indeed, the bodkin's proverbial association with suicide (from Hamlet's soliloquy) is touched on in a discussion of suicide with John Shade in which defenestration is imagined from room 1915 or 1959—Kinbote's dates—of a great hotel.

Kinbote apparently commits suicide on 19 October, the date on his manuscript.[13] The date, one of the details that reveal him to be as allusive as Shade, also shows the allusiveness of Nabokov. Like the Swift of "A Modest Proposal" and *Gulliver's Travels,* Nabokov demonstrates the mileage to be gotten out of a monstrously fatuous persona. The date of Kinbote's suicide is the date of Swift's death, and Kinbote himself draws attention to the literary affinity: "I notice a whiff of Swift in some of my notes. I too am a desponder in my nature, an uneasy, peevish, and suspicious man . . ." (p. 173). Swift, long thought to have died insane, also rescued a poetic manuscript on one occasion. John O. Lyons has pointed out that Swift once saved from the fire a draft of Pope's *The Dunciad.* "Swift then went on as Martinus Scriblerus to write an introduction to *The Dunciad,* which was

dedicated to him, and to contribute a number of facetious footnotes."[14]

But enough allusion hunting. To determine why allusion is central to Nabokov's master class in symbiosis, one should recall again two complementary paradoxes: (1) Kinbote, in the act of producing inept criticism, produces more than half of a brilliantly original novel, and (2) Shade, ostensibly a poet of great gifts, produces a poem with scarcely an original line or conceit in it. Indeed, critics cannot quite decide on the merits of Shade's poem in and of itself. Should the reader admire it or take it as part of the multivalent parody? That one cannot firmly decide just how objectively good Shade's poem is in its own right is highly relevant to this novel's postmodern strategies of signification. Critics have generally assumed that Nabokov wanted simply to produce a plausible piece of work by a vaguely Frostian poet. Some think the poem pretty respectable, others think it must be part of the fun. It is both. Nabokov *wants* the disorientation that comes of encountering a text outside the usual literary venues. The reader is denied the orientation that comes with a poem's appearance in a "little magazine" or anthology—the orientation that comes with knowing that a poem's creator is a real person. Nabokov invites his reader to discover that Shade's subject (death) is less important than the texture of his meditation on it. To put it another way: the real subject of "Pale Fire" (the poem) is its own intertextuality. Hence the overdetermined allusiveness—again, it is also there in Kinbote's text—that is itself an attenuated form of symbiosis, the weave of the larger symbiotic relationship between Shade's poem and Kinbote's interpretation.

The novel's very title comments on this spectrum of symbiosis. Though Kinbote remains comically ignorant of the fact, the title comes from *Timon of Athens,* where it gives expression to an idea of theft, or plagiarism, as cosmic or universal principle:

> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun.
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears: the earth's a thief,
> That feeds and breeds by a composture stolen
> From general excrement: each thing's a thief.
> (IV.iii.441–47)

These lines offer an obviously ironic comment on Kinbote's acts of thievery, from the purloining of Shade's manuscript to the more elaborate fraud of his self-serving annotations. Moreover, Kinbote will end up an exile and

hermit, "like Timon in his cave" (p. 79). Nabokov's allusion hints, too, that criticism, like translation, is but pale fire beside original works of art. Kinbote remarks, "I . . . have caught myself borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb" (p. 81). As will be seen, however, Nabokov's novel also demonstrates the validity of the dialogue between art and criticism—and even engages, with more tolerance than might be expected, the pretensions of later critics to produce texts that are no less intrinsically valid, true, meritorious, or original than the art they ostensibly interpret.

The reader must remember that the phrase "Pale Fire" comes from Shade, who lacks the reader's knowledge of Kinbote's critical machinations. If one asks what Shade means by his title, one is led to disagree with Field's assertion that it is meaningful only from Kinbote's perspective.[15] To be sure, Shade is no misanthrope, like Timon, and he has not been accosted by banditti, as in the scene from which his title comes. But he here endorses Timon's assertion of a universal thievery—or rather he here includes his own art in the universal indictment. One point of Shade's odd willingness implicitly to endorse Timon's assertion—beyond the fact that he also produces a poem so allusive as to approach arrant thievery—is that he himself makes "reflection" part of his theme. For as moonlight is the reflection of sunlight, so is art a "reflection" of life. But like Timon—or for that matter Nabokov—Shade intimates more than once that there is something elemental about reflection (Timon's thievery), so elemental as powerfully to complicate any medium like art that works by reflection, by holding a mirror up to nature. Thus the poem Shade titles with a reference to the universality of reflection opens with a meditation on precisely that subject and its mortal complications for those who, like the waxwing, mistake the reflection for the reality. The artist, by contrast, recognizes reflection for what it is and plays with it, so that inner and outer worlds—like the inside and the outside of Shade's living room—can be made to interpenetrate.

Indeed, a poet like Shade knows that the point of art is not the faithful recreation of reality but the creation of an alternative, self-contained reality.[16] Even the idiotic Kinbote affirms this Nabokovian principle. In his comments on the Zemblan court painter famous for trompe l'oeil, he notes the practice of occasionally including in a field of painted objects an actual example of one of the things represented.

> This device which was apparently meant to enhance the effect of his tactile and tonal values had, however, something ignoble about it and disclosed not only an essential flaw . . . but the basic fact that "reality" is neither the subject nor the object of true art which creates its own

> special reality having nothing to do with the average "reality" perceived by the communal eye. (p. 130)[17]

Kinbote's point here expands on the principle illustrated in James's "The Real Thing." James's painter discovers that real aristocrats make unsatisfactory models for artistic representations of aristocrats, while lower-class models do nicely. Like James, Nabokov drives home the point that art must ultimately be something other than a simple transcription of reality. (Oddly, though, Nabokov seems to reverse the principle when Van Veen, in *Ada,* sees a display that indiscriminately mixes real and artificial roses.)

One of the ironies of Kinbote's narration is that, though mad, he is himself an artist. Indeed, he is an artist because he is mad, as the reader understands from the conversation Kinbote overhears at a party between Shade and Professor Hurley's wife. Shade objects to a word (*madman? lunatic?*) to designate someone—evidently Kinbote himself—"who deliberately peels off a drab and unhappy past and replaces it with a brilliant invention." Surprised by Kinbote, Mrs. Hurley saves the social situation by claiming that they are discussing "the old man . . . at the Exton railway station, who thought he was God and began redirecting the trains." Shade "calls him a fellow poet" (p. 238). Though the reader has only Kinbote's word for the truth of this exchange, it nevertheless seems true to Nabokov's aesthetic—a point that must qualify any assumptions regarding this author's attitude toward criticism.

In the ironies and paradoxes attending on the interaction of Shade and Kinbote (Why is this attractive poet so derivative? Why is this foolish critic such an interesting artist?) and in the overdetermined allusiveness of their strange collaboration, Nabokov makes a surprising case for the vitality of the symbiotic relationship between primary text and secondary, scripture and scholium. Thus he anticipates by nearly two decades J. Hillis Miller's argument, in "The Critic as Host," that terms like "host" and "parasite" prove remarkably slippery, inasmuch as every literary work, like every work of criticism, proves to be at once intertextual host and parasite. Miller, who is replying specifically to charges that deconstructive criticism is a parasite on "univocal," totalizing criticism, observes that "The parasite is outside the door but always already within, uncanniest of guests."[18]

Nabokov makes a case—and not the case his readers would have expected—for the fraternity of all writing. His treatment of the symbiotic spectrum here, from humble allusion to textual piggiebacking, is his message: literary art is universally intertextual, naturally symbiotic. If the more substantial symbiosis remains that of poem and commentary, work of art

and frame, text and supplement, allusions like those of Kinbote and Shade, not to mention those of their creator, reveal the typical debts of both literature and belles lettres. Out of symbionts great and small, out of a variety of intertexts, the artist "forges" originality.

Narcissus and Oedipus

One can think of Nabokov's subject, in other words, as the aesthetics of the symbiont, which he further explores, in characteristically impish fashion, in meditations on mirrors and Oedipal dynamics. Nabokov likes mirrors because they so readily call into question the commonsense distinction between reality and illusion—including the illusion of art. As for Oedipal relations (always an issue in symbiosis), Nabokov delights in lampooning standard psychoanalytic views of the subject. In each case, replication—of reality or nature, of a parent—is problematic. But in symbiosis (especially) the firm distinction between a "parent" reality and a specular reproduction tends to break down. Priority becomes difficult to establish. Ur-texts, like the transcendental signified, endlessly recede before the investigator.

The relationship between host and guest, as noted in previous chapters, is specular. The guest always mirrors the host to some degree or other, and in a number of the symbiotic works examined here, notably *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, Wide Sargasso Sea, Mary Reilly,* and "The Sea and the Mirror," the image of the mirror figures either directly or implicitly. Often, as in the Rhys novel, mirror imagery will be prominent, and sometimes, as in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern,* the symbiotic work will exploit the possibilities inherent in embedded texts—some of which (*The Murder of Gonzago,* for example) the host text furnishes. Even critical analysts of embedding, Todorov's "narrative of a narrative," naturally avail themselves of mirror imagery.

Pale Fire, which Mary McCarthy calls "a book of mirrors,"[19] exhibits especially elaborate mirror imagery, and again, a brief catalogue will be helpful. The pattern of mirrorings, correspondences, and parallels that figures in Nabokov's lesson in artifice begins with the language and culture of Zembla, that "distant northern land" (p. 315). Kinbote observes that the king's uncle Conmal, the not altogether competent translator, had described Zemblan, the language of this bizarre country, as "the tongue of the mirror" (p. 242) because of the supposed ease with which one could render poetry from other languages into it. But "the tongue of the mirror" suggests more than a translator's convenience. The reader of such a phrase thinks of a mirror that can speak. Of course mirrors proverbially "speak"

the truth, and even the magical properties of the mirror in *Snow White* are merely a way of dramatizing every good mirror's true speech in the form of true reflection.

"The name Zembla," Kinbote remarks, "is a corruption not of the Russian *zemlya,* but of Semblerland, a land of reflections, of 'resemblers'" (p. 265). Thus it is a land where someone named O'Connell will marry someone named O'Donnell, where her sons will have the orthographically specular names Odon and Nodo, and where a fleeing king will replicate endlessly as loyal Karlists assume his identity to confuse pursuit by their "shadow twins" (p. 150) or Shadows. The chief industry of this land would seem to be the manufacture of mirrors at the oft-mentioned Glass Works.[20] The explosion that occurs there in 1951 (not to be confused with the fire at an exposition of glass animals the year before) inaugurates the proverbial seven years of bad luck, culminating in the revolution that begins 1 May 1958. Zembla and its inhabitants, then, along with the Zemblan language and Zemblan institutions, are collectively a mirror wherein one sees a variety of rich reflections. The reader can, for example, trace the political fate of a number of East European countries absorbed by the Soviet Union, but more central here is the way Zembla and the Zemblans "reflect" the circumstances and milieu of the more than slightly cracked and suicidal exile Charles Kinbote, who speaks significantly of "the mirror of exile" (p. 267).

The extensive and complex mirror correspondences between Zembla and New Wye gradually allow the reader to see that, in his Zembla fantasy, the mad Kinbote transforms surroundings that, however Arcadian, he finds oppressive. In other words, Kinbote reads and artfully transforms New Wye precisely as he reads and transforms Shade's poem. The two "readings" complement each other. In each instance, a text—New Wye, Shade's poem—becomes the host for Kinbote's Zemblan fantasy, the symbiotic guest. Each act of symbiotic supplementation exemplifies the traditional redemption by art of the familiar—the familiar, in this instance, in art itself.

Some examples (again, one must play Nabokov's game): Kinbote lives in the house of Judge Goldsworth, whose alphabetical daughters Alphina, Betty, Candida, and Dee he mentally transforms into the similarly alphabetical Zemblan royal succession, past and future: Alfin, Blenda, Charles Xavier, and—at his death—Queen Disa.[21] The "*buchmann*" of library books to be returned by the Shades (p. 161) becomes the "*steinmann,*" or cairn, seen by King Charles on his flight from Zembla (pp. 143, 288) as well as the loyalist Zemblan tennis champion, Julius Steinmann (pp. 153, 314). Botkin's disagreeable colleague Gerald Emerald becomes the Zemblan conspirator Izumrudov (whose name derives from Russian for *emerald*); and

just as the Zemblan directs Gradus with information regarding the king's whereabouts, so does Emerald provide Gradus with directions and even transportation to Kinbote's lodging. Both wear "a green velvet jacket" (pp. 24, 255). A colleague in the music department, Professor Gordon (p. 229), becomes a musically gifted youth named Gordon Krummholz (p. 200) among the royalists of Nice. Perhaps Kinbote's unhappy love affair with the fickle "Bob" (last seen with his skis, awaiting a ride out of Kinbote's life) has its Zemblan complement in the story of Oleg, "K.'s beloved playmate, killed in a toboggan accident" (p. 311).

Most bizarre of all, he imagines himself to be the spiritual double, the soul mate, of the community's most distinguished member, John Shade, and he tries to make a case for their intimacy in New Wye. Kinbote thinks of "Pale Fire" as "their joint composition" (p. 312). At the same time he hints at an identity between Shade and the mythical King Charles the Beloved (himself). Shade and the king share a birthday (5 July) and an academic calling. Both lost their fathers at an early age. A literary maternal uncle on one side (Conmal) corresponds to an artistic paternal aunt on the other (Aunt Maud). Both seem to be married to the same woman: Kinbote affirms that Charles's queen, Disa, is identical to the youthful version of Sybil Shade celebrated in her husband's poem (p. 207). Disa and Sybil seem to own the same pair of "close-fitting brown trousers" (p. 86), and the butterfly that Shade associates with his wife also appears on Disa's coat of arms.

Kinbote's landlord, Judge Goldsworth, sentenced the murderer Jack Grey, sworn to vengeance, to prison. As Professor Pardon notes (p. 267), John Shade resembles Judge Goldsworth, and the poet dies in the judge's place. But Kinbote transforms the local malefactor, Jack Grey, into an embodiment of his own fear of death: "Jacob Gradus," alias "Jack Degree or Jacques de Grey, or James de Gray" (p. 77). Like King Charles, Gradus was born on 5 July 1915 (p. 275). In Zembla, land of mirrors and mirroring, Gradus even has a reverse self: the mirror maker Sudarg of Bokay (p. 111)—a name that, read backward, becomes the name of King Charles's nemesis. Indeed, Sudarg had signed his name, a memento mori, in a mirror inherited by the king.

The point is that the mirror reflects the supreme reality of death and simultaneously, as art, affords strategies to confound or transcend that reality. The same goes for the "pale fire" of artistic reflection: it can represent the artistic dead end of impotent copying or the genuinely creative reuse of moribund material. Epigonism or artistic innovation—the same dichotomy that characterizes literary symbiosis. Indeed, as I have sug-

gested before, symbiosis is among the creative strategies subsumed under the multivalent phrase "pale fire."

This doctrine of the mirror takes on additional meaning when placed in the frame of modern psychology and the primitive mythology it variously incorporates. There is a kind of mirroring between the two modes—mythic and psychological—of human interaction with the world. For example, the reflected image, mythically a danger, is psychologically a means of enhanced self-knowledge. But myth and psychology come together in the recognition that the eidolon represents a potentially dangerous part of the self.

A recurrent piece of superstition holds that a person's image in water or a mirror—or even one's shadow—contains the soul (hence Jung's term *shadow* for a part of the psyche). From primitive peoples to Oscar Wilde (in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), the individual's reflected image is taboo: communion with it can lead to loss of the soul. The encounter with a mirror image presumably generates anxiety about which "self" is real—and temporally antecedent. It is the "pale fire" problem in primitive terms: which face is the Ur-text? The feared spiritual evisceration, the loss of soul, is tantamount to death—which is Shade's poetic subject and Kinbote's psychotic obsession.

This ancient taboo, according to Sir James George Frazer, finds its best-known expression in the myth of Narcissus,[22] which lends itself to a number of interpretations. Linda Hutcheon, for example, calls self-regarding fictions like *Pale Fire* "narcissistic narrative" and adduces an early essay by Freud to support her insistence that the term need not be construed pejoratively.[23] But Freud also and more familiarly invokes the myth in a negative sense in his monograph on Leonardo da Vinci. Male homosexuality, Freud suggests, is the supreme realization of the myth of Narcissus: love for the mirror image of self and gender.[24] The thematic prominence of mirroring in *Pale Fire,* then, extends even to Kinbote's homosexuality, an otherwise gratuitous element of the fiction.[25] Ironically, the narcissistic Kinbote descends into a moment's echolalia on one occasion, when speaking of the shadowy figure of a lost love: "I explained that I could not stay long as I was about to have a kind of little seminar at home followed by some table tennis, with two charming identical twins and another boy, another boy" (p. 23). Reduced to playing Echo to this more definitive Narcissus, Kinbote almost hints, in repeated laments for the inconstant "Bob," at a specific stimulus for the madness that renders his critical efforts increasingly absurd.

As the preceding has hinted, Nabokov's play with psychoanalysis extends to Jungian as well as Freudian models. Certainly one recognizes among the more problematic aspects of the satire in Nabokov's novel

the Freudian or pseudo-Freudian material that complicates analysis of the relationship between Kinbote the filial guest author and Shade the parental host author. Readers familiar with Nabokov's work know that it often features details corresponding to familiar Freudian doctrine. Nabokov plants such material—the fantasy of the family romance in *Pnin,* for example—in the gleeful hope of tripping up some hapless Kinbote of a psychoanalytic annotator.[26] Commonly, however, a narrator or favored character articulates Nabokov's unflagging contempt for psychoanalysis. Here the responsibility to strike the appropriate antipsychoanalytic pose falls as much on the despised Kinbote as on the favored Shade. Yet ironically the complex and bizarre personality at the heart of this work—Kinbote—exemplifies Freudian psychology at several points. He is evidently a victim of "those special sensations" reported by Humbert Humbert, sensations "influenced, if not actually brought about, by the tenets of modern psychiatry."[27] The comedy, perhaps, lies in how extensively Kinbote documents the juicier Freudian tenets, beginning with his obviously Oedipal relationship with the paternal Shade.

One notes, incidentally, that the guest author often manages to include the parental host author as a figure in the guest work. In Stoppard's Player, as suggested in chapter 2, one can recognize something of Shakespeare, and John Gardner, as will be seen in chapter 9, includes the *Beowulf* poet in *Grendel.* These examples suggest the spectrum of Oedipal attitudes available to the guest author, whose text can reflect elaborate respect for or more or less subtle hostility toward the literary parent. *Pale Fire*'s guest author, Kinbote, is the dutiful literary son, yet his relationship with the father, Shade, reveals many reptiles of the mind.

Chief among these is his voyeurism, which in literature often disguises a primal scene fantasy—subject, in a variant, of a typically Nabokovian piece of Freud-baiting (p. 94). Kinbote spies on John and Sybil Shade as on the parents whose intimacy he finds now disquieting, now titillating. At one point he neurotically reproaches the poet-father for his candor regarding the frequency with which he and his wife have had intercourse ("Four thousand times your pillow has been creased by our two heads," ll. 274–76); on another occasion he smiles indulgently at what must be going on in the Shade bedroom.[28] He also notes that "Hazel Shade," the poet's daughter, "resembled me in certain aspects" (p. 193). Both are misfits, and he, like Hazel, will commit suicide.[29] Only Kinbote, however, spies continually on his "parents," constantly risking a visual encounter with the act so dreadful to the infantile mind. Moreover, owing to his heteroclite sexuality, Kinbote's Oedipal fixation involves hostility to the "mother" (slighted in his

index, for example) and adulation of the "father." In this regard one notes that Kinbote—qua King Charles—lost his real father before the age of three. At mid-century, when the book was written, early loss of the father was still thought to be one of the contributing causes of male homosexuality.[30] Nabokov, anticipating the revisions of progressive science, resists this simplistic theory by making John Shade heterosexual despite a similar loss.

Another way to read this similarity between poet and commentator is to recognize that at least one alternative to Freudian psychology would make Shade not a father but an alter ego, the "shadow" that his name implies. As such, sexually and socially well adjusted, he embodies a psychological reality complementary to that of Kinbote, whose notion of a special relationship thus proves not so mistaken after all. This perception—that Shade and Kinbote together make up the two sides of a single personality—is one resolution to the old critical problem described by Tony Tanner: "In *Pale Fire* we don't know whether mad Kinbote 'exists' and Shade is his fantasy; or whether Shade is indeed a poet and Kinbote a projection of his subconscious."[31] Most readers, however, accept the apparent—that Nabokov arranges for his Chinese boxes of artifice to house two distinct persons with complementary fantasies (like Pnin and Victor Wind). Thus the author imagines on the one hand a poet (Shade) and, on the other, an exile (Botkin) who projects himself as another exile (Kinbote) who thinks himself a king (Charles the Beloved). Often Nabokov differentiates the artist, who possesses the means of dealing with and even redeeming the past, from the exile, whose fantasies about the past lack the satisfying control of art. But here he blurs the distinction between artless exile and artful mastery of the past. These two persons enact a parable (or charade, perhaps), the burden of which is the impossibility of establishing Ur-authorship. In another blow for the significance and validity of literary symbiosis, the dynamics of literary genesis prove strangely fluid.

Parodic Deconstruction

I have suggested in previous chapters that the strategy of guest authors tends to be deconstructive. The symbiotic guest is an example of what, modifying a term from Rousseau, Derrida calls the supplement.[32] Anything added on to something already supposedly complete—as writing is traditionally thought to be a supplement to speech—has the paradoxical consequence of effectively demonstrating *in*completeness and thereby

establishing the necessity of a new integration. The guest author "supplements" the host text, thereby undermining its putative integrity. Thus one perceives the guest text in *Pale Fire,* Kinbote's commentary, simultaneously as an "extra" and as part of a new whole. But as a framing discourse, Kinbote's commentary is also an example of the "parergon," something outside or aside from the work, the frame that is not part of the *ergon,* the work itself.[33] Criticism is naturally parergonal, and like all parerga its extrinsicality is paradoxically unstable. In delimiting or ornamenting or otherwise adding to the work, the parergon, like the supplement, demonstrates that the work was not complete. The frame, in these terms, is part of the work.

The postmodernist author demonstrates, through a variety of self-referential strategies, an awareness of the aesthetic and even epistemological relevance of both parergon and supplement—of the boundary between the work and circumambient space on the one hand, and, on the other, the work's valence for addition, its resistance to closure. The careful reader of Nabokov soon learns to expect this writer's ingenious strategies of decentering his narratives. Nabokov frankly styled himself a literary trickster, a gamesman on what in this novel he calls "lexical playfields" (p. 260). Like his imaginary poet John Shade, who embraces "not text, but texture" (l. 808), he concerns himself primarily with the play of language and literary structure—and only incidentally with the thematic freight once thought supremely important to the literary enterprise. Thus, whether one speaks of a "Popian" balance between form and meaning or the more naive assumption that form is the surface, meaning the depth, of every literary lake, traditional formulations of the form-content calculus do not hold for a Nabokov novel. Indeed, Nabokov deconstructively reverses the relationship between surface and depth, for readers find his meaning on the surface at the same time that they discover in language, texture, style, and form the teeming life of the lacustrine depths. Only with the proper respect for and knowledge of these depths ought one cautiously to embark on that perhaps unreliable surface.

Nabokov once issued a blanket caution to the critic: "Beware of the modish message. Ask yourself if the symbol you have detected is not your own footprint."[34] This precept suggests that critics who make meaning their first interest risk projecting their own expectations—sometimes even obsessions—onto the text. Nabokov presents a satirically exaggerated example of this error in his daft critic Kinbote, who produces a hopelessly compromised reading of Shade's poem. As G. M. Hyde observes, Kinbote fails to do critical justice to the poet's intelligent meditation on death[35]—a subject of considerable interest to a commentator who performs a kind

of critical suicide as prolegomenon to actual self-murder. Though appreciative of artifice, as his remarks on the Zemblan court painter indicate, Kinbote misses the poet's assertions about its primacy. Kinbote finds in Shade's poem what he wants to find, even though he produces virtually no evidence for his reading. (As Lucy Maddox points out, the variants hinting that Shade might in fact be transmuting Zemblan material turn out to be the fabrications of his desperate and dishonest editor.)[36] Kinbote's reading of Shade's poem also reveals a ridiculous desire to participate in its production—and Nabokov, hinting that many a critic is motivated by precisely this ignoble confession of creative impotence and envy, anticipates to devastating effect the pretensions of a later generation of literary analysts who routinely attempt to place their own necessarily dependent and even parasitic work on the same plane as original works of the imagination. The irony, of course, is that Kinbote's commentary does in fact become part of a literary text larger and richer than Shade's poem by itself. In the end, Kinbote, too, is an artist, and without him *Pale Fire* would not be a novel at all.

As Michael Holquist observes in his introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination,* the novel as a genre naturally "dramatizes the gaps that always exist between what is told and the telling of it, constantly experimenting with social, discursive and narrative asymmetries."[37] Kinbote's "telling" of his story, nominally a critical edition of a literary work of art, tells his reader something other than he would wish. "What is told," moreover, goes beyond the amusingly outrageous self-revelation, for Nabokov contrives here to call into existence, *avant la lettre,* a vision of criticism as it will be—both in its richness and in the altogether new folly of critics claiming that their work equals the texts they interpret.

To consider *Pale Fire* as proleptic parody, one must first see that it enacts or invites deconstruction at several levels—most of them parodic. Parody is in effect caricature, the enlargement of the ungainly feature to comic effect. Deconstruction similarly enlarges—by calling attention to—the ungainly feature in the text. Nabokov's text enacts egregious deconstructions and invites other, more subtle ones. Shade's lifelong search for the meaning of death, along with Kinbote's obsession with the same subject, suggests that life is itself a text to be deconstructed. But it is Kinbote who deconstructs life, while Shade attempts to deconstruct death. Shade scrutinizes death for its lapses, for hints that it is not oblivion, *le grand néant* (l. 618), an end to consciousness. By contrast, Kinbote's complementary analysis uncovers death, creeping Gradus, in the very texture of life. Neither investigation is conclusive: the point of deconstruction is not to substitute one totalizing structure for another but to reveal the ineluctible open-endedness of texts.

More obviously, Kinbote's commentary, which parodies the practice of critical annotation, puts Shade's meanings into play. Kinbote's meanings are in turn picked apart by readers adept at the textual game. In both of these operations the knitted sleeve of meaning unravels along lines laid down by Nabokov. Arrested as parody, they do not enter free fall. A more substantial deconstruction would plumb or expose the privileged terms of the effaced author, but I should like to avoid what seems to me a smugness in much deconstructive criticism, whose premise tends to be that writers cannot finally control language: however great their skill, they will reveal inconsistencies in the system of meaning they embrace—not to mention inconsistencies in their own thinking. As will be seen, I mean to give the last word to Nabokov.[38]

One begins with the most obvious and outrageous of these deconstructions—the Kinbote text that seems at first to be nothing more than a singularly wrongheaded piece of old-fashioned critical annotation. Kinbote's symbiotic guest text is in the form of a commentary that mines the host text for those unintended details out of which he can construct a "meaning" at odds with the ostensible one. Kinbote admits that Shade's poem, "in its pale and diaphanous final phase, cannot be regarded as a direct echo of my narrative" (p. 81)—then proceeds to squeeze the text until it yields precisely that excluded narrative. That fabricated variants (introduced in this same passage) provide much of the "evidence" for his reading need not confound my own point with regard to Kinbote's subversion of the creative hierarchy (though I, too, like any other producer of a text, am eligible for deconstruction). The fabrications merely make more pointed a satire based on the natural tendency of critics to read themselves.

"I have no desire to twist and batter an unambiguous *apparatus criticus* into the monstrous semblance of a novel" (p. 86), declares Kinbote. Such disclaimers inevitably call themselves into question. The reader is ironically aware that Kinbote's *apparatus criticus* is in fact part of a novel, and the critic twice draws attention to the artful touches that belie his pose of humility. He claims, for example, that the principle of imitative form dictates his presentation of certain facts:

> I wish to convey, in making this reference to Wordsmith briefer than the notes on the Goldsworth and Shade houses, the fact that the college was considerably farther from them than they were from one another. It is probably the first time that the dull pain of distance is rendered through an effort of style and that a topographical idea finds its verbal expression in a series of foreshortened sentences. (p. 92)

> I have staggered the notes referring to him [Gradus] in such a fashion that the first . . . is the vaguest while those that follow become gradually clearer as gradual Gradus approaches in space and time. (p. 152)

It is worth noting that only once (in the note to lines 734–735 of the poem) does Kinbote draw the reader's attention to anything like the same technique on Shade's part. But when Shade deploys this technique, he does so with more sophistication than Kinbote realizes. The point is that the idea of a unity between form and content is naive, not central to an artist who can affirm "not text, but texture." Nabokov implies that reliance on this technique announces the inferior artist, and he suggests that only the unsubtle critic thinks of it as preeminent.

The reader is implicitly invited to perform on Kinbote's text the same critical operation that Kinbote performs on Shade's text—and at both levels the reading exposes, as it proceeds, the unstated, the suppressed, the hierarchically disadvantaged. The comically exaggerated aporias of Kinbote's narrative begin at the end of the first page ("There is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present lodgings," p. 13), and within a paragraph or two the writer's nuttiness again intrudes on scholarship: "And damn that music" (p. 15). These lapses become increasingly plain as Kinbote's obsession reveals itself with greater and greater clarity. His own marginalia, remarks to the printers, and despondent ejaculations are incorporated into the text to devastating effect. Beyond these obvious lapses the text discovers two more levels of supposedly suppressed information: at one level Kinbote reveals himself as the exiled king of Zembla; at the other, he reveals himself as V. Botkin. But as deconstruction these proceedings are obviously limited, for Kinbote is authorially a straw man. With regard to the real author, Nabokov, the reader has effected not deconstruction but—again—merely a critically old-fashioned exposure of "hidden meaning."

One can, of course, proceed to an interrogation of the puppet master himself: one can easily argue that the attempt to demonstrate the folly and fatuity into which critical discourse can drift cannot, in the end, be controlled absolutely. Such overdetermination commonly betrays a certain insecurity, and perhaps Nabokov protests too much the violation of the artist's text (Shade's poem, "Pale Fire") by the critic's (Kinbote's commentary). For the boundary of frame and framed dissolves: the criticism becomes part of the criticized. In the end Nabokov makes a profoundly cogent case for the violability of any text—whether Shade's or his own—by the parergonal gloss. Indeed, he even demonstrates the ultimate irrele-

vance of the parergon's congruence, the "fit" of frame and framed. The case for the legitimacy of symbiotic guest texts also gains.

Nabokov seems to be demonstrating the violability of any host text by a guest, including his own text by the critic—Kinbote or Cowart—who desires to engage it. Moreover, Nabokov is eligible for whatever operation the critic proposes to perform on his text—for deconstruction, say, of his obsessive ridicule of Freudian psychology (itself the product of a deconstruction of consciousness, a deconstruction qualified only by Freud's totalizing goal, the ultimately unified model of the mind). Like Jack Cockerell, who "takes off" the title character in *Pnin* until he begins to resemble him, Nabokov comes to have a curious relationship with the "Austrian quack" whose theory he mocks in work after work and interview after interview. Yet for all this, a distinction is in order, for the critic's supplement to *Pale Fire* is not in fact part of a new whole, and here the "logic" of the supplement breaks down. One cannot think of a real-life version of *Pale Fire*. *S/Z,* however impressive, has not become *part* of "Sarrasine," and however welcome the glosses of an "E.K.," one does not regard them as essential to or a part of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. One might be foolish to read Kant on parerga or Rousseau on "the dangerous supplement" without also reading Derrida, but this is diachronic philosophy, not art. In the end, only the artist can criticize so effectively—by means of the symbiont—as to produce new literature. With remarkable prescience, then, Nabokov at once exemplifies and parodies evolving theories of criticism. The effect is to demonstrate a continuity, even an identity, between these theories and their predecessors—the ostensible target for his satire.

5 FATHERS AND RATS

Mary Reilly and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Charles Kinbote, trying to be John Shade's double, gradually reveals another self in King Charles Xavier the Beloved of Zembla. Humbert Humbert, with his droll mirror name, discovers in Clare Quilty an alter ego with whom he executes an hilarious dance around the stable-identity maypole. Yet the psychophobic Vladimir Nabokov, who created these and other doubled characters, once described "the *Doppelgänger* subject" as "a frightful bore"[1]—by which he meant that, having had its literary day, it presented a likely target for the kind of parodic treatment in which he specialized. Although his projections of mental duality become occasions for wicked fun, readers have found Nabokov's burlesques of this topos at once deferential to the tradition of the double in literature, superior to its less imaginative practitioners, and subversive of the science he so despised. Through parody, in other words, this author demonstrates the continuing viability of the Doppelgänger. To paraphrase John Barth, he deals with the exhaustion of a literary subject by rendering it in postmodernist quotation marks.

Where Nabokov plays with the topos in a general way, Valerie Martin in her 1990 novel *Mary Reilly* engages a specific instance of that topos: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. (Nabokov, as it happens, regularly lectured on this novella in his years at Cornell.) Though Martin does not parody the Stevenson text in the usual sense, her strategy for retelling the story leads her to take the central conceit of a doubled identity well beyond the primitive psychology of the original. In Martin's hands the story concerns crippling stratification at the social, economic, and political levels as well as the purely psychological. Dichotomies

of gender, class, and polity, that is, are shown to be related to the psychological phenomenon that splits Hyde from Jekyll. Stevenson's tale, always readable as an allegory of Victorian repression, becomes in Martin's version a much more extensive assessment of the dammed, rechanneled, and sublimated cultural energies of the age.

Martin complicates the psychological doubling in this story by presenting it symbiotically—as a *textual* doubling. One thinks of the connection between self and alter ego as fraternal, but a late metaphor in Stevenson's text implies a different kind of link: "Jekyll had more than a father's interest; Hyde had more than a son's indifference."[2] Indeed, as William Veeder has shown, the imagery associated with the Jekyll-Hyde relationship is overwhelmingly filial.[3] Like symbiosis, in other words, doubling involves filiation. As one can speak of textual parents and children, so can one speak of parent selves and offspring selves. As will be seen, Martin adds a daughter to this family of identities, for Mary Reilly is, like Hyde, a filial part of Jekyll. Symbiosis, then, proves curiously related to the doubled psyche, at least to the extent that self and antiself interact like symbiotic texts. Indeed, with known self and Doppelgänger as with host text and guest text, one can consider questions of dependency, mutualism, and the problematic status of "the dangerous supplement." At the heart of the relationship, moreover, whether in psychological doubling or in symbiosis, one often encounters a deconstructive dynamic.

Martin, however, undertakes only a limited deconstruction of her host text, notwithstanding the example in that text of a subordinate self (Hyde) dismantling and displacing its partner (Jekyll). In its connection with the Stevenson novella, in fact, *Mary Reilly* exhibits none of the pathology attendant on the relationship of Jekyll and Hyde. In that she presents a set of dualities centering in the misguided physician-scientist, Martin does not depart from Stevenson. But in her version of the story, the reader encounters Jekyll and Hyde through the housemaid Mary Reilly, who has survived a childhood of singular brutality and horror with a good heart and even a smattering of education (she can read and write). With Mary as narrational medium, Martin can, unlike Stevenson, take readers directly into the genteel Jekyll household and show how its internal hierarchy reflects the bizarre split between the gifted Jekyll and the vicious Hyde. Readers approach the socioeconomic roots of this archetypal story at the same time that they come closer to the problematic character of Jekyll, who emerges as an ambivalent figure, Mary's "Master," her symbolic father, and even, perhaps, her god.

Much of Martin's originality lies in this refocalizing of the tale. Most

Doppelgänger stories make the doubled character central, frequently as narrator (as in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer," or Poe's "William Wilson," or Margaret Atwood's recent novel, *Cat's Eye*). Stevenson, however, fragments his account of Jekyll's tragic experience. He allows a succession of narrative voices—anonymous observer, Mr. Enfield, Dr. Lanyon, finally Dr. Jekyll himself—to take the reader further and further away from the viewpoint character, the lawyer Utterson. In *Mary Reilly* the eponymous heroine takes over the focalizing role of the lawyer; she also narrates in the first person. In her psychological complexity and in her ability fully to describe the Victorian servant's world, Mary becomes as interesting to the reader as the archetypal pair under scrutiny. Mary provides the expected account of the troubled scientist and the reified projection of his vicious lower nature, but she also tells about herself. In a variety of subtle ways her story proves intimately linked to that of Jekyll and Hyde. "Abused children," Elaine Showalter points out in her review of this novel, "may escape the traumatic memories by developing multiple personalities; and thus Mary's past gives her a potential connection to Jekyll's experiments."[4] As narrator, moreover, Mary provides a much-needed continuity and a tighter focus than the original. At the same time, she extends the story's meaning to new social and political dimensions. An example of what Bloom calls ***daemonization,*** her version of the appropriated story discovers more than that of its first teller. With fewer inhibitions than her predecessor, the author of *Mary Reilly* undertakes to explore more fully, in Marxist and feminist terms, the ramifications of the doubleness central to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*

Psyche and Society

The Victorian ethos proved remarkably congenial to the psychological breakthrough that would expose its pathologies, for the insights of Freud—*The Interpretation of Dreams* appeared scarcely a decade after Stevenson's novella and only a year after publication of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*—gestated in the same late nineteenth-century womb that produced these works. Both Stevenson and Martin present psychological insights that challenge the commonsense notions of their contemporaneous readers. Foregrounding Jekyll, both authors explore a doubling that comes to be symbolic of a whole world of Victorian inhibition and hypocrisy. Stevenson concentrates on hints that every human being has a shadow self, Martin on the social and economic doubling that issues from this universal bifurcation of identity. Both imply that a rigid social order takes a grave toll on

psychological wholeness. Each produces a text, too, that exemplifies its era. The author of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* gauges Victorian confidence in and fear of science, glances at the spiritual anguish of the age, and probes the virulence of repression in a time that remains synonymous in the popular imagination with the high tide of a stringent and spirit-killing moralism. *Mary Reilly,* as an historical fiction, reinscribes these aspects of the host text, but at the same time it nods to the postmodernist moment in several ways: replicating a prior text, calling attention to itself as writing (and, in the last line, as fiction), dismantling myths of scientific objectivity and paternal benignity, and obliging readers to recognize the death of the author.[5]

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* Stevenson produced a story universal in its appeal, because every person finds onerous the denial of appetite, dreams of unfettered indulgence, and pines, even, for some return to the polymorphous perverse that Hyde represents. Thus Stevenson produced one of those classic tales that demonstrate the artistic imagination as quicker—or at least more mythopoeically cogent—than the scientific. One almost forgets that contemporaneous psychology was already probing for layers beneath consciousness.[6] Like Sophocles, Shakespeare, and the assorted German poets that Freud recognized as his psychoanalytic precursors, at any rate, Stevenson had his own grasp of what a more systematic science would characterize successively as the problematic relationship between id and ego (Freud), as the necessity of "integrating the shadow" (Jung), and as the impossibility of reconciling subject and other (Lacan). Had Stevenson lived another decade, he would have seen the new mental science validate the psychology in his novel on the way to characterizing human psychological identity as more than merely bipartite. Indeed, Jekyll remarks at the end of his story that others may go beyond his discovery of a second self: "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens" (p. 49).

But Stevenson, content with the theme of mental duality, presents his characters in complementary pairs, so that before readers see clearly the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde, they have grown accustomed to the relationships between Utterson and Enfield, Utterson and Jekyll, Utterson and Lanyon, Utterson and Guest, Utterson and Poole, and Jekyll and Lanyon. References to archetypal pairs like Cain and Abel or Damon and Pythias also figure. Stevenson suggests, further, that his viewpoint character, "the moral norm of the story," as Irving S. Saposnick observes,[7] has a secret or at least secondary side to his personality. The one who makes one half of so many of the novel's meaningful pairings, the upright Mr. Utterson, frankly represses a troublesome sensuousness. Utterson seems con-

sciously to avoid even the most venial temptation, as if the slightest slip might prove disastrous to his private moral economy. He "was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years" (p. 3). Thus in the opening paragraphs the reader encounters, on the one hand, hints of appetites held in check and, on the other, hints of a characteristically Victorian distrust of self-indulgence or voluptuousness—anything that might interfere with what Jekyll calls "effort, virtue and Control" (p. 51).

How does *Mary Reilly* differ? Stevenson, from the very beginning of the story, hints at the simple moral allegory that will emerge more fully in Jekyll's concluding confession: if one gives in to the baser instincts, they wax—one becomes irreversibly a baser person. But where Stevenson's psychological double is emblematic of moral planes in the human soul, Martin's is more involved in social tiering, and *Mary Reilly* even grapples with the complex relation between nature and culture. Thus the psychology that figures in Martin's narrative is more complex than that of the host text. Stevenson remains under the influence of an obsolescent but still compelling Christian psychology: the two selves of his narrative correlate with spiritual alternatives for the human soul. In Martin these ideas have become highly attenuated. She examines the archetypal duality as index to and analogue of divisions between the sexes and classes. Stevenson remains in thrall to an idea of spiritual selves; Martin assesses cultural selves.

Not that Martin neglects traditional moral symbolism altogether. Part of the success of her novel lies in its ability simultaneously to exploit the original psychological dualism and to develop a symbolism based on later, tripartite models of the psyche that lend themselves to moral analogy. The twentieth century has long since come to terms with the dichotomy between surface and subsurface personalities, between conscious and unconscious selves, between subject and other. Martin knows that the story's interest no longer depends on the shock value of a second, evil self; journalism, after all, has furnished too many examples of the quiet clerk who comes to work one day with an automatic weapon, or the pleasant mechanic who rapes, tortures, and murders boys in his spare time. The creator of *Mary Reilly* complicates the classic mental twinning with the introduction of the additional psychological component that early psychoanalysis added to the mental dualism it inherited from Doppelgänger stories. Martin's narrator-heroine functions as either Freudian superego or Jungian anima (one can interpret Hyde as either id or shadow). At the same time, she affords a traditional moral balance to Jekyll's drama. Like Faustus prompted by good

angel and bad, like Shakespeare in sonnet 144, like Othello between the pure Desdemona and the vicious Iago, the Jekyll of *Mary Reilly* hesitates between projections of his own better and worse nature. This explains why, despite the growing evidence of his reprobation, he never manages to alienate the devoted Mary—and why she, no less than Hyde, must share his collapse at the end. Symbolically appropriate, Mary's fate drives home the point that she shares an identity with Jekyll and Hyde.

As the commentator on her manuscript remarks at the end of the novel, Mary risks her good name and livelihood with her final gesture of loyalty, love, and identification:

> Given the compromising situation in which she was discovered (even by contemporary standards, a domestic found late at night in her nightgown embracing her dead employer might expect repercussions), it seems probable that she did not leave Jekyll's house with that document most vital to the Victorian servant, that passport from hardship and squalor to the haven of domestic servitude: a good 'character.' However, as Mary shows herself throughout her chronicle to be a resourceful and honest young woman, as well as a better than average servant, we can surmise that she recovered from the shock of her master's suicide and landed on her feet in some less fantastic household.[8]

One finds the commentator more convincing with regard to the impairment of Mary's good name than with regard to her subsequent employment prospects. In fact, one is inclined to understand the commentator to be speaking of some generic servant, for Mary, as an individual, will almost certainly share the fate of Hardy's Tess or Ruined Maid. As a class, on the other hand, "Mary" can and will survive, raise her consciousness, and eventually secure more extensive education, better economic prospects, and more justice.

Martin's Marxist and feminist thinking inevitably proves somewhat subversive of epistemological givens, but, as previously noted, she does not attempt—by reversing the standing of Jekyll and Hyde, for example—fully to reconfigure the tale's original moral polarity. One can perhaps see more clearly what Martin does here by considering what she does not do. What, in other words, would be the strategy of a more radically revisionist retelling of Stevenson's story? Would not Hyde become its tragic hero? To see the possible validity of such an inversion of the hierarchy of characters in the story, one has only to imagine how Lawrence (or Blake, or Mailer) might think about Hyde—surely as a personage in touch with the fecund darkness, perhaps a healthy primitive warped by and unable to flourish in

a world given over to the narrow proprieties of Victorian England. From this hypothetical perspective, Stevenson's tale becomes that of a victim of "hidebound" Victorian mores. One notes in the Stevenson text, in fact, a curious density of positive language in Jekyll's descriptions of the feelings associated with his alter ego: "gaiety" (p. 48), "sensations . . . indescribably new, and . . . indescribably sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body" (p. 50). The thought of wickedness "braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exulting in the freshness of these sensations" (p. 50). "Like a schoolboy," he can at will "spring headlong into the sea of liberty" (p. 52), enjoy "the comparative youth, the light step, leaping pulses and secret pleasures" (p. 56) of the Hyde self. As this telltale spontaneity dissipates, it still leaves behind "raging" and unquenchable "energies of life" (p. 60) so that, even at the end, Jekyll can say ruefully of his hated alter ego: "his love of life is wonderful" (p. 61).

With material like this, extraction of countermeanings can become too easy, too predictable—too irresponsible, even. Although her Marxist and feminist vision dictates certain deconstructive touches or strategies here, Martin has little interest in comprehensive hierarchical reversals. For one thing, she clearly wants a Hyde no less vicious than Stevenson's. Though she renders Jekyll more ambiguous, she retains the psychological Manichaeism she inherits from her precursor. At the same time, however, she reads Jekyll and his alter ego as the exemplars of a culture-wide schizophrenia. More than anything else, her success in limning this larger cultural context—not to be confused with simply working up the Victorian setting and atmosphere—makes *Mary Reilly* something considerably more than the superficially historical drugstore romance it constantly risks being. In its analysis of a sexist and capitalist society, Martin's novel proves entirely worthy of the classic with which it must perforce remain perennially twinned.

But how does Martin get from psyche to society? How connect a whole economic order to a mental circumstance? Not that such a connection strains credulity—what better source for the lineaments of culture than the circumstances of mental nature? From Bacon and Montaigne to Freud and Norman O. Brown, of course, philosophers and psychologists have argued that all of history and society replicates or enacts basic mental dramas. The mechanics of repression at one level become the dynamics of civilization-building at another, and the very deity is revealed as an Oedipal parent. Contemporary writers, however, are less content blithely to extrapolate culture from nature, for they have discovered the problematic character of the relationship between the two. Thus Martin, even as she undertakes to link a pervasive economic and social stratification to a central instance of

mental doubling, declines to assume the absolute validity of the psychological paradigm—or even the distinction between nature and culture. In other words, Martin does not accept the mental duality as a "nature" clearly differentiated from socioeconomic "culture." She evinces an awareness that both terms are fluid, that capitalist or phallocentric culture may recuperate or "colonize" nature, making it knowable to itself only as already-culture, hence blind to its own inauthenticity. Jekyll is two people as much because he lives in a culture that will not accept human sensuality as because of some absolute principle of mental tiering. To put the point in another way, one recognizes the Victorian *epistemé* as "author" of the age, along with its consciousness and the creative products and projections of that consciousness, which include not only Henry Jekyll but also Wilde's Dorian Gray and all the characters of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Marxist terms, Martin seeks to expose the ideology that makes the Victorian economic and social order as pathologically stratified as the identity of Jekyll or Dorian Gray. In feminist terms, she seeks to expose the dubious premises of phallocentrism. She goes in search of something anterior to ideology, anterior to the *Logos*, the father, and the Symbolic Order.

Thus she places considerable emphasis on the cheval glass that she inherits from the Stevenson story. The reader may reflect that anyone who looks into a mirror can see a double, emblem of a psychological reality. In Stevenson, the glass is the traditional symbol of self-absorption, vanity, and, paradoxically, self-knowledge. Jekyll gauges his now triumphant, now wretched transformations in this glass. In *Mary Reilly,* on the other hand, Jekyll's mirror projects the author's contemporary, Lacanian recognition that identities are never anything more than fictions, the stopgap measures whereby one deals with a desire that can never close with its object, a subject that can never know itself. The mirror now signals the eternal exile from that moment of tragically false wholeness in infancy: the mirror phase, when "self" and "other" were one, when other *was* self. Jekyll's painful tergiversation between two mutually antagonistic identities merely arrests and presents in sharp relief the inadequacy of every human imago, every provisional identity or version of the elusive subject.

Fathers and Rats

This sharpening and focusing of the mirror conceit is typical of the way Martin effects a change in the reader's perception of the host text. One realizes, for example, that only with difficulty does Stevenson's tale move beyond a hackneyed cautionary "moral"—don't indulge the lower nature—

recognized as dubious mental hygiene long before Freud. ("He who desires but acts not," said Blake, "breeds pestilence.")[9] Martin helps the reader see how much the Stevenson story omits, how coyly unspecific it remains in the matter of Hyde's transgressions. For the most part Stevenson fails to make any provision for the libidinal component in his study of mental doubleness and inversion. He presents the brutal and murderous substratum of the Jekyll personality but offers scarcely a hint that the appetites unloosed through the alter ego might include the sexual. Though Hyde behaves churlishly, knocks down a child, and murders an M.P., the reader hears nothing about the predations of a presumably liberated libido. If one heard the entire story from Hyde instead of from its cautious and genteel narrators, Stevenson implies, one would not hear anything too shocking to Victorian prudery. The author is so cautious in these matters, in fact, that his text evinces the same repression it has generally been taken to anatomize.

But texts often say more than they seem to. One thinks of the symbolic detail with which a Mary Shelley, a Bram Stoker, or an Oscar Wilde intimates realms of appetite about which the nineteenth-century author could not be frank (or only, as Hardy discovered, to the peril of a literary livelihood). Dr. Frankenstein's monster, for example, is his own sensuality: he labors over it in nervous, furtive secrecy, like any masturbator, and he never doubts that it will be with him on his wedding night. Vampirism, the central horror of *Dracula,* is really a devious metaphor for sexual experience (vampires, like sexual initiates, constantly seek to extend the affected circle). Wilde, by the same token, loads *The Importance of Being Earnest* with images of a gluttony that, however droll, gradually reveals itself as an "earnest" of appetites not directly described. Wilde also reveals the furtive Victorian self by allowing virtually every character in his play—from Algernon and Jack (both of them aka Ernest) to the servant, Land, and the governess, Miss Prism—eventually to reveal a secret, a "past." In at least one line Wilde seems actually to glance at the popular Stevenson fiction: "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and really being good all the time. That would be hypocrisy."[10]

Small wonder, then, that critics wring the Stevenson text for every faintest nuance of a psychosexual dimension. Is the walking stick with which Hyde murders Sir Danvers Carew a substitute phallus? Does the verb that figures in Mr. Utterson's recollection of a piece of Hyde's brutality—he "trod the child down" (p. 11)—hint at bestial sexuality? Is the ugly, diminutive yet crescive Hyde, as Dr. Mark Kanzler ingeniously suggests, the liberated phallus of the repressed Henry Jekyll?[11]

Such symbol hunting suggests the critical disinclination to accept Steven-

son's reticence in this matter at face value. In a letter cited by George S. Hellman, the author claimed to have omitted all reference to a sexual component in Jekyll's vicarious mischief out of healthy-minded disinclination to stigmatize sex and sheer impatience with its thematic banality:

> Hyde. . . . was not . . . Great Gods! a mere voluptuary. There is no harm in a voluptuary; and none, with my hand on my heart and in the sight of God, none—no harm whatever in what prurient fools call "immorality." The harm was in Jekyll, because he was a hypocrite—not because he was fond of women; he says so himself, but people are so filled full of folly and inverted lust, that they can think of nothing but sexuality.[12]

The point about the theme of hypocrisy is well taken, but Stevenson is being naive or disingenuous when he suggests that such hypocrisy does not increase in obloquy as it is shown to be shielding sexual transgressions. Thus critics rightly complain about the lack of specificity regarding what Nabokov calls "ominous allusions to pleasures and dreadful vices somewhere behind the scenes." Probing Stevenson's reticence, Nabokov asks, "Does it not denote a certain weakness in the artist?"[13]

Both the Stevenson and the Martin texts open with the brutalization of a little girl, and late in Stevenson is this remark: "Once a woman spoke to him, offering . . . a box of lights. He smote her in the face, and she fled" (p. 59). But only Martin's novel develops fully the idea that the theme of Stevenson's famous Doppelgänger story must properly subsume the victimizing of women, children, and the poor—whether by arrogant privilege or by the brutality that same privilege tolerates and even breeds. Martin, who adds the murder in the establishment of Mrs. Farraday (the madame in Soho), seems acutely aware of the proximity of the original publication of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1886 and the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 (a byword of violence against women, the Ripper murdered a number of streetwalkers). She evidently knows, too, about the extraordinary energy of Victorian pornography—not to mention the ubiquity of brothels and prostitutes in Victorian London. Where the Stevenson tale contains scarcely a mention of women or children, and where, too, it avoids all overt speculation about the possibility of sexual appetites on the part of Jekyll or sexual predations on the part of Hyde, *Mary Reilly* reclaims all that has been symptomatically omitted. Its heroine gives a voice to the repressed other. She writes the body of the child, the body of the woman, the body of the worker under the Victorian capitalist dispensation.

Child, woman, worker. Thomas Pynchon would call them the preterite,

the "passed over," the omitted, those who do not count in the equations of power. The wretchedness of their fate at the hands of a patriarchal order is announced in the novel's terrifying opening scene, in which the young Mary suffers the abuse of her brutal father. The scene compacts a whole history of relations between fathers and their children, especially the horrible punishments devised in antiquity for those who raised their hands against or otherwise dared to challenge the patriarchal system. The most terrible of these punishments—being sewn into a sack with a monkey and a serpent—was reserved for the parricide. What is done to Mary—she is locked in a closet with a rat whose violent terror is the equal of her own—at once recalls this ancient punishment and suggests, in its gratuitousness, the cumulative sickness and degeneracy of which patriarchy proves historically capable. This opening scene presents emblems of the moral stagnation of a poisoned society that breeds rats literally and figuratively. It declares, too, that in Victorian England and in Western culture generally, father and rat are the same.

A casual reader might think that Mary Reilly has two paternal poles in her life: her brutal father and her gentle "Master." Clearly, the more than servantlike loyalty and reverence she feels for Jekyll stem from her desire to idealize him as the gentle father she never had—and as the spouse she feels she must not aspire to. Yet Jekyll, however benign he seems, however devoted to "good works," is also, somehow, the evil father. Though one reviewer called him "a good man and a good master,"[14] he is a monster of complacency and selfishness, a social parasite. His education and medical gifts he squanders on the most self-indulgent research imaginable, and he cheerfully lets his overworked servant give up what little free time she has to carry out tasks for him. When Mary pads around the dark house at night on the track of a Jekyll she takes for an altogether different person named Hyde, she grapples with the superficially illogical conviction that she has returned to the baleful orbit of her father. In the middle of one paragraph in which she describes her pursuit, the pronoun *he,* hitherto referring to the presumptive quarry, Hyde, suddenly refers to the father (p. 97)—long out of her life but always with her in spirit and presently to return in the flesh. "When he was drinking," she once explains to Jekyll, this worthy seemed to exhibit a personality at odds with the one in evidence in sobriety. With unknowing irony, Mary explains that

> "He was a different man then—he even looked different, sir, as if the cruel man was always inside him and the drinking brought him out."
>
> "Or *let* him out," Master said softly. (p. 28)

At the same time, however—and this is where Martin moves beyond what Orson Welles once disparaged as "dollar-book Freud"—she is half aware that her brutal father and her kind master are somehow brothers. The reader, meanwhile, recognizes them as merely a variation on the Jekyll-Hyde duo, the twin faces of Victorian paternalism and patriarchalism.

Father and rat. Rat and closet. When Mary goes to view her dead mother at Mr. Haffinger's, she finds that the landlord has put the corpse in a little closet off the stairs. Like the closet below stairs in which Mary suffered her father's abuse, this one is tiny and cramped. Again, rats and the father lurk nearby. Why these parallels? These spaces exemplify cramped lives that transpire "below stairs," they symbolize wombs reduced to (and traduced by) their productive or reproductive value, and they imply an appalling exitlessness in the life of the Victorian working-class female. At the end of the story, as David Gates points out, "Hyde (like the rat) bites her," and "she says what she said as her father locked the closet door: 'Please, sir. Do not do this'" (pp. 6, 238).[15] Subsequently, Mary is found with the remains of her employer in the "cabinet" that is yet another closet. In each of these closet tableaux the reader encounters a literal or figurative death. In the last one, Mary embraces a body of ambiguous identity. Its finders, like those in Stevenson, describe the corpse as that of Hyde, yet Mary mentions the white hair of Jekyll (nor would she lie down with Hyde). The ambiguity here reminds the reader again of the terrible equivalence of rat (Hyde) and father (Jekyll).

Mary recognizes a "dark place" (p. 35) within herself, the legacy of her father and a permanent analogue to the closet under the stairs. One can interpret this internal shadow, this microcosmic black hole, as her fear of the sexuality that Foucault characterizes as "the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us,"[16] but Mary herself construes it as emblematic of a truth about existence that more fortunate people do not see. She sees that misery and darkness occupy no small part of life, and she knows that rich people err in striving to escape these afflictions altogether. Her "dark place," then, is also her intimate awareness of evil—the grim, existential knowledge she strives to deal with through her writing (p. 162). She feels that her employer shares these insights; unlike her, however, Jekyll locates the evil in his own heart, not in some more generalized venue.

But where does Martin locate it? Does she construe evil as wholly masculine, or does she see it as more generalized, more dispersed? Given the blamelessness of the heroine and the overdetermined villainy of the central duo, not to mention that of Mary's father, one might think that for this

author evil has an exclusively male face. But Martin is merely highlighting patriarchal exacerbations of a broader human corruption. Indeed, something bad nestles even in the heart of Mary herself. Though one should not make too much of her conniving at Jekyll's intrigues (she visits the loathesome Mrs. Farraday more than once), she does admit to difficulties in reconciling virtue ("being good") and virtuous action ("doing good," p. 78). More importantly, prompted by her employer, she admits that at times she fears something in herself (pp. 142–3). Coming from one so virtuous, this declaration is puzzling unless one keeps in mind Mary's place in the moral trinity that, in Martin, replaces Stevenson's simple duality. If Mary represents Jekyll's good side and Hyde his bad, they are two levels of the same moral nature. However highly attenuated, Hyde is somewhere in Mary's heart, and vice versa.

Martin, then, invests most of her interests and energies as storyteller in extending the story's archetypal mental bifurcation into a social and sexual duality. Where Stevenson takes the social order for granted, Martin draws attention to the way its tiering grows out of and replicates the central mental duality. The social hierarchy, with a privileged and idle class living genteelly while large numbers of Morlock-like servants teem and moil, even replicates itself in the world below stairs, where butler and housekeeper reign tyranically over assorted cooks, maids, grooms, and other functionaries. This dimension, scarcely hinted at in Stevenson, makes *Mary Reilly* an intriguing meditation on the economic ramifications of or complements to psychological doubleness.

Thus for Martin the doubling, which ramifies variously in the social, economic, and religious spheres, becomes more broadly structural. Her Victorian world is every bit as claustrophobic as Stevenson's (beginning with the ghastly opening scene of the child in the pantry with the rat), yet she manages to make the story's symbolic dimensions more extensive than those of the host text. She contrasts the wealthy and superficially disinterested Jekyll, worth "a quarter of a million sterling," (p. 31) according to Stevenson, with the hard-working, impecunious servants she takes the trouble to imagine: Poole, Bradshaw, Cook, and the pathetic Annie. Though also a servant, Mary is the social amphibium here; with her lettered sensitivity, she mediates between the genteel world of Jekyll and his circle and that of her own class. She alone of the servants can grasp something of the portentousness of the heated discussion in which Jekyll, arguing violently with his friends Lanyon and Utterson, seems to glimpse the passing of his world. This conversation, on the merits of extending education to the laboring

masses, sounds like the melancholy rumblings of superannuated gods, unaware of the imminent going out of lights all over Europe, unaware that the Götterdämmerung is indeed at hand.

Foucault has shown how institutions determine who may speak with authority, and in *Mary Reilly* the narrator struggles to make herself heard within the capitalist, logocentric order. "I've no right to speak now, nor have I ever" (p. 162), she declares, for she knows, as Foucault says, that "none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so."[17] The housemaid, in other words, is not empowered to speak by the larger capitalist-patriarchal order of which she is a part. That order speaks her. But Mary—and a few others in her position, as the author notes in the epilogue—has acquired a little education and with it the possibility of authorized speech or writing. Jekyll's interest in Mary's written testimony is one of the more sympathetic facts about him, along with his involvement with efforts to extend education to the working classes. "Education," says Foucault, "may well be . . . the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse." Dr. Lanyon's impassioned rejection of Jekyll's projects would seem to stem from the acute awareness of just how much of a threat education poses to the privileges of their class. But perhaps he should reflect that "every educational system," as Foucault says, "is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and powers it carries with it."[18]

Religion and Science

Victorian fictions, whether actual literary products of this period or historical novels set in it, naturally deal with the age's rude energy, its faith in progress, its ambivalence toward science, and its crisis or crises of faith. To varying degrees, *Mary Reilly* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* concern all of these issues, especially the interrelated subjects of science and religion. One finds striking the way each book draws out latent aspects of these subjects in its symbiont. The insistence of Stevenson on excluding women and sex from his narrative, for example, helps the reader to assess their special prominence in *Mary Reilly*. Martin's novel, by the same token, develops a strange religious symbolism that retroactively colors a reader's experience of the host text, in which one would not have thought to look for symbols of Christ's passion. The guest text, with its suggestively named heroine and the master who guides her steps, allows its readers to see in the origi-

nal Jekyll and Hyde an unexpected allegory of the deity who became all too human.

Also important is the treatment of science in these works, notably Stevenson's characteristically Victorian ambivalence toward the Darwinian theory that exercised so many of his contemporaries. Not for him the forced optimism of Tennyson, who, anticipating both Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin, imagines in *In Memoriam* an evolutionary process moving from the biological and physiological to the moral and spiritual. He urges humanity to

> Arise and fly
> The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
> Move upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die.[19]

Stevenson displays a more venerable spiritual conservatism. In "Epilogue of the Cigar Divan," for example, he remarks, "These are my politics: to . . . bear in mind that man is but a devil weakly fettered by some generous beliefs and impositions; and for no word however sounding, and no cause however just and pious, to relax the strictures of these bonds."[20] Thus in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* he plays with the ancient Platonic and Christian idea that the human being occupies what Pope calls the isthmus of a middle state between lower and higher orders. For Stevenson, the doubling is at once psychological and spiritual. By giving in to his baser self, Jekyll allows the inner Cain to slay the inner Abel—in Christian terms, he promotes his own damnation.

Thus Stevenson slips in a telling number of images suggestive of the bestiality that human beings keep at bay precariously at best. He invokes "apelike fury" (p. 19), a "masked thing like a monkey" (p. 37), "apelike tricks" (p. 61), and "apelike spite" (p. 62). With more than a glance at an earlier gothicism, Stevenson expresses the fear that Victorian science—as practiced by Darwin, in particular—somehow promotes the tolerance of bestial behavior, the "something troglodytic" (p. 13) within the human breast. If we are all apes under the veneer of human civilization, why aspire to angelic transcendence? In Jekyll, whose vile experiments take place over an old "laboratory" or "dissecting-rooms" (p. 22), Stevenson imagines a Darwin thirty years after *The Origin of Species:* promoter of a science that can make the human being increasingly apelike, but not increasingly angelic.

Too well informed simply to reject Darwinism, Stevenson registers the nervous awareness of his age that many cherished ideas about the significance of humanity could not coexist with the new doctrine. At the same

time, he embodies a thoroughly modern acceptance of Darwin's most famous thesis. As Stevenson slyly remarks in *Memories and Portraits,* "Each has his tree of ancestors, but at the top of all sits Probably Arboreal."[21] Stevenson's witty allusion—the last two words are from chapter 21 of *The Descent of Man*—heralds the twentieth-century writer's more relaxed attitude to Darwin and the implications of evolutionary theory (one thinks of Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton joking about William Jennings Bryan and the Scopes trial, and Bill declaring, with mock piety, "Let us not pry into the holy mysteries of the hencoop with simian fingers").[22] The author of *Mary Reilly,* by the same token, does not attempt to persuade her readers that scientific curiosity and experimentation risk going too far—as she might have done in terms of ecological catastrophe, the fear of which is the contemporary equivalent of the distrust that, in the Victorian era, coexisted with the most extravagant faith in science and the progress it promoted. She does, however, encourage the perception—in her novel and in its host—that Jekyll plays a role in the continuous drama of science and the popular imagination. Thus he occupies a place in the continuum from Faustus to Frankenstein to Fermi.

Stevenson makes Jekyll's degrees significantly numerous: "M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S., &c." (p. 9). Medical Doctor, Doctor of Civil Law, Doctor of Laws, Fellow of the Royal Society, and "noted professor" (p. 52), Jekyll is, like Faustus, a devotee of *scientia* rather than *sapientia,* seeker after more knowledge than will profit a human being. The "&c." in the list of his degrees and professional affiliations allows the reader to fill in the full Faustian catalogue, familiar from the opening lines of both the Marlowe and the Goethe plays:

> Habe nun, ach, Philosophie,
> Juristerei und Medizin
> und leider auch Theologie
> durchaus studiert.[23]

Dr. Lanyon reports that Hyde, in Marlovian tones, offers him, too, the Faustian vision: "A new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you" (pp. 46–7). Jekyll in extremis, like Faustus, affrights the members of his household by crying out at the recognition that he faces the end of his lifelong flirtation with the pit. "We heard him cry out upon the name of God" (p. 34), observes Poole of his magian master.

But however conventionally pious the ejaculations of Poole, and however frequent the allusions to infernal drives and ideas of absolute evil,

one notes a remarkable absence of any speculation about the possibility of Jekyll's reforming, repenting, being saved by God. Far more deterministic, this vision, than the traditional Faust stories, wherein, whatever the doctor's fate, the possibility of a saving repentance remains a perennial consideration. In the post-Renaissance milieu, Jekyll's fate derives less, perhaps, from his impiety than from his situation in the historical and cultural continuum. His is the cumulative anguish, that is, of a civilization less and less able to account for suffering and evil in spiritual terms.

The Victorian period saw such anguish as never before. The revelations of contemporaneous geology, biology, and other science—not to mention the anthropological relativism of Fraser and the appalling logic of the higher criticism in the textual study of sacred texts—drove faith to the wall, and sensitive souls like Tennyson, Arnold, and Hardy read their Lyell or their Darwin and despaired. Darwin, preeminently, drove home the message that the human form, far from divine, was only a later model of the ape's. Thinking, reading, observing Victorians required no Nietzsche to tell them that God was dead.

In the light afforded by its symbiont, *Mary Reilly, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can be seen to exemplify these religious concerns as well as the scientific ones previously noted. Stevenson's story, especially as reimagined by Martin, encapsulates at once the demotion of humanity from its angelic aspirations and the recognition that the God who became a human being was never more than the projective fantasy of a reasoning but flawed animal. More than a nostalgic recapitulation of a familiar theological case for the angelic and the infernal as part of the human equation, Jekyll and Hyde prove also to be the shriveled residue of an ancient idea of the deity who could effect intercourse between higher and lower spiritual states of being: Jekyll is an ineffectual Jehovah, Hyde a burlesque Christ.

One of the curious things about *Mary Reilly* is the way the reader begins to find creepy the heroine's inability to see her beloved "Master" in anything like the true light of his moral debility, complacency, and hypocrisy. With her insistence on the word *Master,* her repeated encounters with him "on my knees," and her mention of Jekyll's three-day absence in his cabinet at the end ("as if . . . in a tomb," p. 231), Mary becomes an ironic commentator on the Victorian spiritual crisis, as one would expect in an artfully constructed historical novel. For surely the reader is invited to connect the appellation *Master*—always in her mind and once on her lips—with the scriptural *rabbi.* This might explain the frequency with which the author arranges for Mary to encounter this master in an attitude or posture of genuflection as something more than the most obvious kind of Marxist

symbolism. Perhaps, just as Stevenson's tale can be read as a burlesque of the New Testament (the high and good Jekyll suffers "incarnation" as the terribly low but utterly human Hyde, who becomes something of a scapegoat for all human impurity and bestiality), so Martin's story concerns the incarnation of a capitalist-rationalist-patriarchal rabbi/master and his problematic, never consummated relationship with a physically and spiritually damaged woman who remains almost fanatically devoted to him.

Henry Jekyll, rabbi of "phallogocentrism"? Martin's Jekyll is clearly the beneficiary of—and in some measure the apologist for—a patriarchal system that traces its origins all the way back to the *Logos* celebrated, in the first sentence of the Gospel of John, as the masculine principle of order and reason in the cosmos: "In the beginning was the Word." At the end of the first chapter of this gospel, the disciples address Jesus as "Master." In the penultimate chapter, Mary Magdalene encounters Christ at the tomb and addresses him in the same way. He replies with the phrase that occasioned so many Renaissance paintings, the phrase that so fascinated D. H. Lawrence: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father."

As noted previously, Martin's reshaping of Stevenson's tale derives part of its disturbing effect from the reluctance of Mary and the inability of Jekyll, at least in propria persona, to admit to sexual desire. Jekyll, in fact, is not yet ascended to the father in precisely the Lawrentian sense: he has not procreated, he remains a bachelor. Only as Hyde does he circumvent celibacy, and then he does so in predictably hideous ways. But Mary's similar reluctance to accept her sexuality, as will be seen, may stem from something less pathological.

Mary's conversations with Jekyll and her activities in the disused back garden that Martin inherits from Stevenson (and turns to better account) remind the reader of biblical gardens and biblical passages about the grain that falls on stony ground and the tares and wheat. Here Mary learns how all "plants" struggle to flourish, however harsh the ground in which they must live, and here she and Jekyll allegorize weeds, which appear without being cultivated and prove hardier than the desired plants. "Being wild, they have a greater will to life" (p. 57). Mary draws a parallel between weeds and neglected but hardy children like herself; Jekyll knows the weeds for his own irrepressible inner evil. In this symbolic garden, at the spring equinox (crocuses are poking through), a climactic encounter takes place between the story's Magdalen and its miserably resurrected Christ, still locked in his Hyde self and unable to resume the form of the divine Jekyll-Father-deity.

One can clarify the symbolism here by noting the gnostic subtext that

Martin weaves into her novel. Gnosticism is the "shadow" of historical Christianity, the version of it that once pointed along a different spiritual—and political—path for Western culture. Orthodox Christianity promoted hierarchical structures and institutions in general, patriarchy and the subjection of women in particular. Gnosticism, by contrast, tended toward more spiritually and politically democratic postures. The orthodox subordination of women was challenged by the gnostics, for whom Mary Magdalene showed the spiritual distinction of which women, like men, are capable.

Through her narrator-heroine, Martin hints at both ancient and contemporary alternatives to patriarchal authority and its corruption. Unable to "find solace in prayer" (p. 231) and perhaps altogether without faith in the usual sense, Mary Reilly remains a creature of exotic spirituality, a *gnostic* Magdalen. This identification enables the reader to understand why she "cannot be like others and look forward to the future, making plans and provisions for a shared life" (p. 165). Like the gnostic Magdalen that Elaine Pagels compares to "certain radical feminists who today insist that only those who renounce sexual activity can achieve human equality and spiritual greatness," Martin's twenty-two-year-old heroine, though evidently desirable, feels obliged to give over what one gnostic text calls the "works of femaleness"—a phrase interpreted by Pagels as referring to "the activities of intercourse and procreation."[24]

According to gnostic teachings, which repudiated literalistic interpretation of Christ's actions and message, the world of the senses is illusory; another, shadow world is real. "It may be," as Jekyll remarks, "that *we* are the trick of the light" (p. 241). This mystical doctrine has an obvious affinity with modern psychology: what holds true of the conscious and unconscious mind in one system holds true of the phenomenal and noumenal realms in the other. Just as the psychoanalyst equates mental health with knowledge of the unconscious, the gnostic construed knowledge of God as knowledge of the inner, unknown self—the god within. From this perspective one recognizes the Jekyll and Hyde story—Stevenson's or Martin's—as a parable of orthodox, patriarchal Christianity's subversion of gnostic truth.

To the Victorian concern with science and religion, then, and without sacrificing period verisimilitude, Martin brings the twin perspectives of antiquity and the twentieth century. A textual double about psychological doubling, *Mary Reilly* weaves together Marxist and feminist insights to explore the social and cultural ramifications of an imaginary yet represen-

tative "strange case" of psychopathology. Its author, voyaging far beneath the surface of her host text, forces it to yield up meanings at once "new" and always there. She subjects the patriarchy and paternalism of the rat-fathers to a feminist critique of great subtlety and imaginativeness.

6 THE SEXUAL AND CULTURAL OTHER IN PEKING AND NAGASAKI

Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and the Operatic Host

The butterfly: an ancient and richly varied symbol in both Western and Eastern art. Poets and mythographers traditionally associate it with the soul, with rebirth, and with transformation. In the story of Cio Cio San and Lieutenant Pinkerton, this symbolism is inflected through its full range. In all versions of the story, the encounter of a Western Eros and an Asian Butterfly-Psyche fails to eventuate in the marital happiness that, ironically, the butterfly traditionally symbolizes in the East. The heroine of Puccini's well-known opera *Madama Butterfly* takes her name, appropriately enough, from this venerable emblem of a soul transported and traduced by love. In David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly,* on the other hand, Puccini's character becomes a text as well as a person, and themes of rebirth and metamorphosis take on specifically textual meanings.

The symbolism of rebirth figures in the least obvious way, for both Puccini's opera and Hwang's play represent the artistic resurrection of prior texts. The story of the little geisha and the American naval lieutenant has gone through a number of transformations in the century it has been around. It begins as the 1898 short story "Madame Butterfly" by John Luther Long, who claimed to have heard it from his sister, a missionary's wife in Japan. (He may also have known of the similar story in Pierre Loti's 1887 novel *Madame Chrysanthème,* which became a light opera by André Messager in 1893.)[1] Long's "Butterfly" became a one-act play, the fruit of a collaboration between the short-story writer and David Belasco. Subsequently the composer Giacomo Puccini collaborated with librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica to transform the play into an opera of

two acts, comprising three scenes. Neither of these transitions—from story to play, from play to opera—constitutes symbiosis, for the same material simply moves from one medium to another. True symbiosis occurs when, relocating the action to China and France, Hwang rewrites the opera as the play *M. Butterfly*. Indeed, he effects an appropriately lepidopteral metamorphosis, for with this latest stage in its textual evolution, Long's story has gone through four phases that resemble the four-stage life cycle of the butterfly itself: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis), and adult.

Even so, Hwang risks a kind of parasitism, for his play in effect battens on the opera (the most recent and best-known of the previous versions of the story) and seeks to flourish at its expense. Though one hesitates to describe as Oedipal the relationship between Hwang and Puccini, the American playwright proves decidedly unfriendly to the work he appropriates and creatively misreads. Hwang, intimating that Puccini owes his ideas of the East to David Belasco, seeks to give the lie to a cultural stereotype in the host text. Puccini, after all, fell in love with the Butterfly story when he saw the play in London, even though he could not understand the language in which it was performed. In other words, he encountered the archetype *infans:* he brought his own blinders, his own cultural predispositions, to the story. Yet Hwang, too, projects personal concerns onto the material with which he works. In the afterword to the play he remarks that he conceived it before he knew the opera:

> I felt convinced that the libretto would include yet another lotus blossom pining away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love. Such a story has become too much of a cliché not to be included in the archetypal East-West romance that started it all. Sure enough, when I purchased the record, I discovered it contained a wealth of sexist and racist clichés, reaffirming my faith in Western culture.[2]

Hwang admits that he came to *Madama Butterfly* knowing what he would find. Small wonder that he found it. Thus the playwright is at times guilty of cultural and aesthetic miscalculations like those for which he takes Puccini to task. He makes errors like those he claims to expose, and in some ways his own blindness about Puccini and his work resembles that of Gallimard with regard to Song and the Chinese opera. Yet miraculously the miscalculations do not detract from either *M. Butterfly* or the host text.

My discussion, in what follows, is in three parts: an introductory exploration of how Puccini and Hwang grapple with the theme of East and West, an assessment of how both manipulate a fantasy of incest and its punishment, and a consideration of how the myth of Eros and Psyche fig-

ures in the two works. Ultimately I argue that the symbiosis here, though grounded in Hwang's hostility to what he takes for cultural stereotyping in the precursor text, promotes perception of thematic depth and complexity in both works. In other words, where a Harold Bloom argues that the ephebe "misreads" the predecessor, I would suggest a further complication. The guest text, however inimical its author to the predecessor, inevitably redeems its host even as it exploits or deconstructs it. Not surprisingly, the guest text echoes or ekphrastically contains its predecessor. But at the same time it comes to impinge strongly on the host text, retroactively modifying its meanings.

The Limits—and Rewards—of Misreading

How do Puccini and Hwang handle the idea of a sexual or cultural Other? Although Hwang is more sensitive to gender issues, he is not really more sensitive to ethnicity. Surprisingly, the Italian composer knows his geisha better in many ways than the Asian American playwright knows his French diplomat. Puccini is the superior ethnographer. As will be seen, however, Hwang's misconstructions of ethnic identity are deliberate, part of a meditation on the international theme that is considerably more ambitious than Puccini's treatment of East and West.

In the afterword, Hwang explains that he set out explicitly to do "a deconstructivist *Madame Butterfly*" (p. 95), and he does this brilliantly—at least in the sense of reversing the opera's hierarchical oppositions. To deconstruct, as Derrida explains in *Positions,*

> we must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis,* but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition.[3]

Thus Hwang reverses the hierarchies of male/female and West/East in *Madama Butterfly*. Yet he cannot so easily overturn the most important hierarchy of the host—that of music over words (as Catherine Clément has pointed out, this can be the means whereby listeners are lulled into accepting a host of phallocentrically tendentious features).[4] Hwang counters the music of Puccini with an equivalent amount of authentic Chinese music,

but thereby he achieves dialectic, not deconstruction. His only recourse is to transpose the opera into a form in which music can be safely relegated to the background. Inasmuch as the continued health of the host depends on its musical, not its literary, vitality, one need not fear that Puccini's opera will suffer in its symbiotic relationship with Hwang's play.

Moreover, given the slightness of this opera as *literature,* the deconstructionist breaks a butterfly indeed on his wheel. Who, after all, remembers Giacosa and Illica, the librettists? They are so obscure that through most of this chapter I refer to Puccini as the "author" of *Madama Butterfly*. Though one can think of serious and substantial libretti—by von Hofmannsthal for Strauss, by Da Ponte for Mozart, by Wagner for himself—those of most operas tend toward the romantic, the sentimental, the sensational, or the outright silly. Operas about the East make especially extravagant demands on good sense: Delibes's *Lakmé,* Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers,* and Messager's *Madame Chrysanthème* are the norm, Adams's *Nixon in China* the exception. As fictions the Italian and French operas tend to be patronized; they have not been thought to merit the kind of serious critical interpretation routinely given to the operas, say, of Wagner's *Ring. Madama Butterfly,* then, like its congeners, is a fiction that dances on the brink of absurdity. To look here for sophisticated treatment of the cultural Other might seem like taking *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to task (as has in fact been done) for its cavalier treatment of religious tradition. Though the verismo style that influenced Puccini dispenses with the baby-switching plots and other absurdities ridiculed by Gilbert and Sullivan (whose *Mikado* Puccini knew),[5] even operas exemplifying or influenced by verismo—*La Bohème, Manon Lescaut,* Charpentier's *Louise*—wallow in the romantic clichés: artists and seamstresses in garrets, the world well lost for love, the deaths of beautiful women. Thus Proust's aesthetically discriminating Marcel, in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs,* can dismiss as hopelessly vulgar the work of Puccini's friend and fellow composer Mascagni.

Not that any of this matters. Disparagers of opera have always tended to raise irrelevant questions about a popular art form whose energies are not invested in the political or philosophical issues to which serious art—or criticism—supposedly devotes itself. Yet one errs to accept too readily the idea that these works are indefensible. Indeed, the contumely of its author notwithstanding, *M. Butterfly* sends one back to Puccini's opera, brings that work before the mind, where it has previously, perhaps, been present to the ears only. *Pace* Hwang, one is enabled to see, beyond the easy pathos, the opera's surprising substance. For notwithstanding its "operatic" absur-

dities, *Madama Butterfly* discovers more cultural and psychological depth than might at first appear—and the unbiased literary critic who looks at Puccini's opera as a fiction does not come away wholly unimpressed. Such a critic might fault Hwang's reading of his original at several points, for in a number of ways the playwright has oversimplified. The author of *M. Butterfly* observes in his afterword and implies through Gallimard that Puccini presents an unqualified picture of Asian submissiveness before Western masculinity, yet *Madama Butterfly* is not a simplistic dream of female "Oriental" complaisance. Hwang misses, for example, the fact that Puccini liberates his heroine from the barbarous pidgin she speaks in both earlier versions of her story. Her idiom, like that of Pinkerton, is good Italian.[6] He misses, too, the testimony of secondary characters like the Bonze and Cio Cio San's cousins that Butterfly errs to embrace her Yankee. "We come," says musicologist William Ashbrook, "to see that Butterfly's tragedy is not just that she is Pinkerton's victim; rather, her faithfulness is an anomaly even in her own culture. Her attitude is incomprehensible to Goro and to Yamadori."[7] This Yamadori, by the way, hardly merits his characterization, by Song, as the Japanese equivalent of a "young Kennedy" (p. 17). He is simply a Japanese Pinkerton.

The point, again, is that the original is not really purveying a cheap fantasy, nor was Puccini simply ignorant of Eastern culture. According to Ashbrook, Puccini "was enthusiastic about the plot at first for the opportunities it gave to stress the conflict between Eastern and Western values and culture."[8] Mosco Carner, looking into Puccini's study of Japanese music, identifies seven Japanese melodies woven into the opera's musical texture.[9] Carner notes, too, that Puccini had conversations with a Japanese actress in Milan and with the Japanese ambassador's wife in Rome. "In addition to this information, he consulted collections of gramophone records of Japanese music and books on Japanese customs, religious ceremonies and architecture. He all but became a student of Oriental ethnography, as he did again some twenty years later for *Turandot*."[10] In this later opera, one notes, Puccini dispenses with Western characters altogether; here Liù, the meek Asian woman, is played off against the strong-willed Asian heroine, Turandot herself. In other words, Puccini produced not one but two works superior to the general run of operas on Eastern themes.

Puccini's ethnographic errors, upon inspection, prove few and venial. For example, though informed by the wife of the Japanese ambassador that the name Yamadori, which he inherited from earlier versions of the story, was not suitable for a male character, he did not consider the matter suffi-

ciently important to merit a change. Puccini errs more substantively when he has Butterfly characterize herself and Pinkerton, in the love duet that figures repeatedly as background music in Hwang's play, as the moon goddess and the sun (*l'occhio del firmamento*). In Japanese mythology, the moon is masculine, the sun feminine. But the error—again, partly inherited—enhances characterization, for the sun is supreme, and Butterfly rightly associates what is supreme in her life—Pinkerton—with the solar principle. The moon deity, moreover, is an inconsequential figure in the Japanese pantheon, and Butterfly, of "people used / to tiny things, / humble and silent," as Gallimard reminds the audience (p. 56), gives further expression to her own humility by identifying herself with this celestial body.

Puccini, then, knew his business better than his artistic successor would have one believe. Indeed, the fact that the rival's text, *M. Butterfly,* compels fresh attention to (and the discovery of a number of hitherto unnoticed strengths and beauties in) the Puccini text suggests anew an idea central to this whole study: that in symbiosis the host text benefits as well as the guest text. Thus deconstruction, sometimes maligned as critically nihilistic, proves remarkably satisfying as an artistic tool, one of the most useful to the symbiotic enterprise. Deconstructive techniques, in fact, often combine with Bloomian misreading to produce new artistic work in an environment in which originality seems increasingly problematic.

But what, in the present instance, does the guest gain? Exploitation of the Puccini text does, one must admit, enable Hwang to say more than the precursor does about "the conflict between Eastern and Western values and culture." Where the opera expends its primary energies to develop the pathos of its heroine's position, its symbiont explores more radically the relationship between two individuals of different cultures—the problematic "marriage" of East and West. If this play, like the opera, ends in suicide, it proposes self-destruction by the Western male rather than the Eastern female. The grimness of this denouement hints at the fate of a moribund West if it fails to rethink its mythologies of cultural superiority.

Hwang achieves a thematic expansion by deliberately compounding the already extensive saladization of culture in Puccini. Consider: in London, an Italian composer who does not understand English sees an American play about the tragic involvement of an American naval lieutenant and a Japanese woman. This story becomes in turn the raw material of an Asian American author's play about a French diplomat in China who, unhappily married to a woman named Helga, has a brief fling with a Danish woman and a long-term affair with a Chinese man who impersonates a woman.

The nationalities involved here—they include British, Italian, American, Japanese, French, Danish, Chinese, and others—reveal a calculated assault on cultural assumptions of every stripe. Paradoxically this cultural salad, this hodgepodge, becomes the vehicle of a probing analysis of the ways in which a blinkered chauvinism fails to recognize and grasp cultural diversity.

One might object that Hwang pays little attention to cultural accuracy in his characterization of the French—that, as Gabrielle Cody argues, he actually descends to portraying "stereotypically French libidos."[11] He certainly imagines "condos" in Marseilles in 1947 and French undergraduates frolicking with naked women in swimming pools. But such apparent howlers merely call attention to cultural stereotypes and their violation. By the same token, Hwang eschews anything remotely resembling a naturalistic idiom for his characters, nearly all of whom drift into and out of colloquial speech that most often approximates what John Louis DiGaetani calls "a TV sitcom style"[12] or a kind of generic adolescent hip: "How's it hangin?" says Pinkerton/Gallimard (p. 5). "Girl, he's a loser," says Chin/Suzuki (p. 12). "You have a nice weenie," says Renee (p. 54). Hwang even plants references incongruously dependent on American acculturation, so that Song, product of a culture largely cut off from the rest of the world for decades, can explain to a French diplomat the absurdities of *Madama Butterfly* through references to a "homecoming queen" and "a young Kennedy." Hwang thus fuels a comedy of cultural misrepresentation. Declining to represent French mores accurately, the playwright deploys the story's confusion of cultures—like its confusion of genders—to his own ends. Ultimately, he adds to that confusion the better to drive a wedge between his Western viewers and what one might call their own *Gallimardisme*—a disease that manifests itself in self-serving perceptions of the sexual and cultural Other. As Gallimard must admit that he is Butterfly, so must the audience in some measure recognize Pinkerton in themselves.

To what extent is the audience implicated in Gallimard's sexual and cultural short-sightedness? The play's acceptance and success imply considerable enlightenment on the part of its audience. Product of the historically significant moment when a sensitive playwright has the good fortune to address a sophisticated and cosmopolitan audience, an audience enlightened by its own recent history, the play nevertheless offers subtle reminders of the insidiousness of cultural and sexual chauvinism. How many in the audience, for example, wonder which is the patronymic in a name like "Song Liling"? How many recognize this as a *masculine* name? Gallimard's "Mademoiselle Song" does not give one pause, as "Mademoiselle

Richard" or "Mademoiselle Bob" immediately would. The play's title, on the other hand, forces one at least to consider the near-oxymoronic "Monsieur Butterfly" (in fact the original title) as the correct "reading." Like any Gallimard, I submit, one disregards the testimony of the title and the very subject of the play to hear "Song" as a feminine name.

The audience, in a sense, is among the dramatis personae. It has no lines, but many lines are directed—as the stage directions repeatedly specify—"to us." This "us" needs nudging because of the tenacity, the insidiousness, of cultural chauvinism. Gallimard represents a world of Westerners—and especially Western men—who see what they expect or want to see. Song makes the point forcefully when he first meets Gallimard and they discuss the plot of *Madama Butterfly*. Gallimard declares it "a very beautiful story" because he does not reflect on the cultural stereotyping. Song sets him straight:

> Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner—ah!—you find it beautiful. (p. 17)

Westerners tend to see only the deference in *différance*. If Gallimard knew anything about the culture in which he lives, he would know that the person he sees performing at the Chinese opera must be a man, since all women's roles—according to the tradition of onnagata—were taken by men. Ironically, Gallimard presently enjoys a reputation among his fellows as someone knowledgeable about the local culture.

When Song seems reticent, early in their dance of seduction, Gallimard reflects: "She is outwardly bold and outspoken, yet her heart is shy and afraid. It is the Oriental in her at war with her Western education" (p. 27). Ironically, Gallimard is undergoing an "Eastern education" with which the Occidental in him is at war. Gallimard assumes or wants to believe that his Butterfly "feels inferior to" her sisters in the West—and to him as well (p. 31). Such a conviction relieves him of having to look into his own shabby soul, of having to gauge his own weakness. He extends his variously warped perceptions to the professional sphere, where he becomes a type of the Western strategist who led first France, then the United States

into disastrous Indochina policies. "Deep down, they miss the old days. You know, cappucinos, men in tuxedos" (p. 45), Gallimard confidently tells Ambassador Toulon, blithely parroting the misinformation that Song has previously fed him. If one reflects on Song's later candor about what his mother did in Shanghai in the old days (she was a prostitute), one sees the reality beneath the robes and veils of illusion. The line about "cappucinos, and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz," which one hears three times in the play, captures not only a romantic, Western image of prerevolutionary China, but also the Western desire to believe that the Chinese themselves might pine nostalgically for the time when they could submit contentedly to the strong, masterful occupiers and their immensely appealing institutions. Gallimard reports officially that "Orientals will always submit to a greater force" (p. 46). It takes thousands of lives in Vietnam to disprove this assumption, and Song addresses all the Gallimards who refuse to accept the meaning of Western defeat in Vietnam when he tells the judge, "you'll lose in all your dealings with the East" (p. 83).

The male Westerner will lose in his dealings with the East because he sees only a false image, product and reflection of a need to dominate women and pigmented races—preferably at the same time. In the play's protagonist, who escapes a sense of weakness and inferiority through a fantasy of sexual power, one sees a coalescence of erotic and political pathologies. Gallimard remarks at one point that he "took a vow renouncing love" (p. 14) when he made a passionless marriage with Helga. Such a renunciation—as Wagner's Alberich learns—is proverbially the price of power, which the West has single-mindedly pursued in its international relations. Thus the Alberich of *M. Butterfly,* a moral dwarf who represents a whole generation of Western power brokers in Vietnam and elsewhere, pathetically sustains his blind attachment to the person he mistakes for a miracle of self-abnegating Asian womanhood. He sacrifices his very identity, not to mention the diplomatic interests of his country, to an erotic chimera.

To summarize: Hwang presents his audience with a politically and erotically iconoclastic reading of Puccini's opera. Yet he also allows one to see Puccini's drama, no less than his own, as a "deconstructivist" morality play. The protagonists of these dramas must both learn a painful lesson about absence, presence, and the limits of signification. Butterfly worships her picture of the absent Pinkerton but learns that it is the sign of an endlessly deferred presence. Gallimard, too, learns that the sign—an image of ideal Asian womanhood, in his case—has no "transcendental signified." Song is an absence masquerading as a presence. Song is thus the whole galaxy of

Derridean approximations: trace, hymen, *différance*. The gender pronoun for Song, in fact, almost begs to be written exclusively *sous rature,* under erasure, for it is never completely adequate to what it must represent.

Intimations of Mortality

The relationship between the play and the opera approximates an ideal mutualism, especially as regards each work's psychoanalytic content. Hwang's *M. Butterfly* not only depends on *Madama Butterfly* for its meaning, it becomes an occasion for the discovery of new dimensions of significance in Puccini's opera. On the one hand, obliged to look more closely at *Madama Butterfly* as a fiction, one recognizes neglected thematic substance; on the other, one learns to view Puccini's Pinkerton as a text for Butterfly to read, just as Butterfly herself—or Song in the guise of Butterfly—is a text for Gallimard to read. Inevitably, Butterfly and Gallimard read in the book of themselves. The audience, then, becomes the reader over their shoulders, the reader of their reading. Perhaps, too, to make out the script, this audience-reader will consciously or unconsciously seek to take the psychosexual measure of these characters. The investigator of symbiosis, meanwhile, participating in this hypothetical psychological probing, sees further how host and guest benefit from their symbiotic attachment.

In such an attachment, at its most basic, the guest author replicates the host author's text, or part of it. Hwang, for example, structures his play as a set of parallels with Puccini's opera. These parallels, significantly, constitute a collective symbiotic repetition, complement to the repetition that figures internally in Hwang's text in the form of recurring motifs and figures. In addition to its obvious intertextual significance, this repetition permits itself to be construed psychoanalytically. It enhances and extends the implications of such constants in literary symbiosis as Oedipal dynamics, incest fantasy, and primal scenes, for it functions like the repetition that figures prominently in all phases of psychoanalytic theory. Fixated individuals, for example, enact and reenact the developmental stage or stages of libido development at which some unresolved trauma arrested them in childhood. As readers of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* know, repetition can also be construed as the announcement or intimation of an instinctive reality at odds with the rude vigor attending the formation of infantile sexual identity and libido development. It was in contemplating repetition that Freud conceived his theory of the death instinct.

Within the play—to consider intramural repetition first—Gallimard and the culture he represents are locked into a set of attitudes and acts that re-

veals the perceptual and behavioral pathologies discussed in the first part of this chapter. Gallimard struggles Laocoön-like with acts of repetition determined psychologically, culturally, and textually. He also contributes, along with his fellow characters, to patterns of motivic recurrence of a type familiar in modernist literature. The repetition of the line about "cappucinos, and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz" has already been cited. Other repeated words and phrases include "cad," "bounder," "the mouth says no, the eyes say yes." Actions, too, recur: Gallimard meets Song at a party at the German ambassador's, Renee at a party at the Austrian ambassador's; his aborted stripping of Song is reprised in Song's insistence on stripping himself at the end. Song's address to Gallimard when he first attends the Chinese opera ("Yes. You. White Man," p. 20) recurs in the courtroom fantasy of the last act, and Gallimard's crawling across the stage like the mortally wounded Butterfly while speaking Pinkerton's last lines ("Butterfly? Butterfly?") is repeated in the last scene when, like Butterfly, he kills himself and is obscurely eulogized by the Pinkerton lines, now spoken by Song.

In literary art, patterned repetition promotes the development of meaning. References to cuff buttons recur in *The Great Gatsby;* fragments shored against ruins recur in *The Waste Land.* Such repetition serves the artist's thematic ends. In modernist literature, which often concerns a cultural fragmentation in the midst of a universal meaninglessness, the repetition of motifs also calls attention to the distinction between art, which is ordered, and the world represented in art, which is not. But as early as Gertrude Stein (the first postmodernist, as Heide Ziegler remarked in a 1988 symposium)[13] or Samuel Beckett (some would nominate Djuna Barnes or Nathanael West), repetition becomes increasingly ironic—the idiotic echolalia of a meaningless circularity rather than the announcement of an artist's godlike control.

In many twentieth-century works, from Conrad's *Lord Jim* to D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel,* repetition becomes the vehicle of specifically psychological meaning. The repetition in such works—as in *M. Butterfly*—can be analyzed with reference to the various ways the mind deals with erosions of its early polymorphous perversity. Psychoanalysis shows that repetition can be "read" as a mechanism central to the mind's strategies for adjustment to the reality principle. In the mind and in behavior, as in art, the point of repetition is to enact a ritual of control—to comfort oneself by manipulating the very sources of discomfort. "The impulse to work over in the mind some overpowering experience so as to make oneself master of it," Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* begins in childhood (the

famous *fort/da* illustration) and becomes "a compulsion to repeat—something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides." The word *instinctual* is important here, for Freud goes on to develop the theory of "*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*"[14]—a "conservative" instinct, that is, at odds with the libidinal or "life" instincts he had long thought to constitute the whole of psychosexual reality. Hypothesizing that repetition comes to target recovery of a primal inorganic state, then, Freud identifies the compulsion to repeat as the inchoate expression of a death instinct—the instinct gratified when Gallimard, in his little galaxy of dramaturgical repetition, commits suicide.

Though he had relatively little to say on the subject, Freud was aware that artists, too, engage in acts of repetition. Writing a drama based on another drama, the author of *M. Butterfly* performs an act of repetition ritualized as art. Exorcising an offensive stereotype, he engages in his own more sophisticated version of the *fort/da* game. But to see what further psychoanalytic subtleties attend the twinning of Hwang's play and his host, one must examine, in the carefully constructed parallels between *Madama Butterfly* and *M. Butterfly,* the actual structure of symbiotic repetition.

The presence of the host text *within* the guest text, especially as a play within the play, is often, as noted before in this study, a symbolic rendering of the primal scene. But whose? In discussing *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* I suggested that *Hamlet,* the play within the play, and *The Murder of Gonzago,* the play embedded in *Hamlet* (hence doubly embedded in the Stoppard drama—a play within the play within the play), become variations on the primal scene, interesting convolutions of the Oedipal dynamic that colors *Hamlet* itself and Stoppard's relationship with Shakespeare. The author of *M. Butterfly,* however, does not view Puccini as an Oedipal father, and one does not attempt to reflect on the authorial psychology here, as, prompted by Goethe, one does with Stoppard. Instead, one tries to imagine a psychology of texts, in which texts take the places of parent and child in standard psychoanalytic theory. What the audience views in the scenes from (and other traces of) *Madama Butterfly* in Hwang's play is the parental text, present in—part of the makeup of—the filial text. Here the audience catches glimpses of the paternal Pinkerton and the ostensibly maternal Butterfly going through the business that engenders the offspring text it has come to see.

For the most part, in accordance with his stated desire to deconstruct *Madama Butterfly,* Hwang in his play spins a web of reversals and disorienting double reversals of details in the Puccini plot. These inversions

begin with Gallimard's recapitulation—partly acted, partly summarized—of *Madama Butterfly*. Gallimard himself takes the part of the voluptuary Pinkerton; his friend from school, Marc, takes the role of the sensible and humane Sharpless, American consul at Nagasaki. Gallimard admits to the miscasting: he has always been feckless and unsuccessful with women, in contrast to the sexually aggressive Marc. "In life," he says, "our positions were usually—no, always—reversed" (p. 7). This sequence, at once a play within the play and a *mise-en-abîme,* contains in miniature the whole of Hwang's "deconstructivist" strategy of appropriation and hierarchical reversal.

Hwang devotes the rest of act 1 and part of act 2 to the ironic development of the relationship between Gallimard, who comes to see himself as masterful and suave—a real Pinkerton after all—and Song, who artfully mixes boldness with what Asian Americans call "pulling a Butterfly" (the behavior described in this phrase, from Hwang's afterword, obviously resembles that of "doing an Aunt Jemima," mutatis mutandis). Song's strategy is simple: reinforce every racist or sexist predilection on Gallimard's part. S/he pretends to admire his knowledge and discrimination, s/he feigns an "Oriental" and feminine weakness before his masterful Caucasian masculinity, s/he encourages him to think his wife wholly responsible for the absence of children in his marriage, and so forth. Gallimard goes along contentedly, growing more and more incapable of objectivity and more and more complacent in what he takes to be his dominant role. Pinkerton has found his Butterfly.

Hwang also follows Puccini in supplying his mythic couple with a child—and an extraneous spouse. Gallimard's wife, Helga, takes the "role" of Kate Pinkerton. The child's textual parentage is as mixed as its biological parentage is supposed to be: it is a child of not only the Italian operatic stage but also the American absurdist theater, its first cousin the imaginary "blue-haired, blond-eyed" darling of George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Like that Albee play, too, *M. Butterfly* concerns the agony of surrendering a powerful illusion and its narcotic comforts to truth. Like George and Martha, Gallimard nurses a debilitating illusion over a period of decades, and like Albee Hwang thereby characterizes such an illusion as peculiarly robust and enduring.

Although Hwang expands the time of the action far beyond Puccini's three years (only two in the original versions), the parallels are otherwise meticulously developed. Irony notwithstanding, Hwang's characters correspond to their alter egos in the Puccini opera. Yet the irony builds, and the audience gradually comes to understand that Gallimard is the real inno-

cent here—a Butterfly naif in his own right. Beginning at the end of the second act, the skewing of the parallels becomes explicit. When Gallimard, in France, says to Song, "I never doubted you'd return" (p. 77), he is now fully the Butterfly who waits, the Butterfly whose reunion will eventually—after yet another fifteen years—prove bitter indeed. In the scene after the trial, "Gallimard enters, crawling towards Song's wig and kimono," as "music from the 'Death Scene' blares over the speakers" (p. 84). A death has taken place, the death of an illusion. "Butterfly? Butterfly?," cries Gallimard. The crawling, as noted above, rehearses that of the mortally wounded Butterfly at the end of Puccini's opera. The words, however, are those of Pinkerton, who is heard offstage before he enters to encounter the fruit of his thoughtlessness. In other words, a collapse of identity is announced: the conflation of Pinkerton and Butterfly commences in Gallimard's troubled soul. In the third and final scene, the identities come to rest in an ultimate reversal. Gallimard dresses as Butterfly and announces, "My name is Rene Gallimard—also known as Madame Butterfly" (p. 93). Then he commits seppuku, after which Song delivers the Pinkerton query: "Butterfly? Butterfly?" (p. 93). Pinkerton and Butterfly have exchanged roles.

Why? Part of the answer lies in the psychoanalytic content of the Puccini drama that Gallimard has embraced as a life fiction. Exclusively the product of the male imagination in all four of its incarnations, *Madama Butterfly* projects onto its fifteen-year-old heroine an incestuous desire. Thus it contrasts interestingly with *Jane Eyre,* an incest fantasy produced by a woman. Like Jane, Butterfly, the "child," possesses the "father," Pinkerton, and someone must suffer for the violation of the incest taboo. Her real father, guilty of some nameless transgression, was obliged to commit seppuku—a transverse cutting of the lower belly strongly suggestive of castration. His daughter presently finds herself married to another father, but she encounters the standard Oedipal betrayal: the mother (Kate Pinkerton) has the more valid claim. Butterfly, like her real father, visits a condign punishment on the guilty party. When she penetrates herself with the father's sword, it is also the phallus: the incestuous act and its punishment become one (for Freud, in fact, the butterfly can be a symbol of the female genitals).[15]

In its transition to *M. Butterfly,* this story undergoes a number of psychological complications, for Gallimard, the playmaster and presenter of this spectacle, is himself, no less than his story, the cultural and intellectual offspring of Pinkerton and Butterfly. Gallimard considers *Madama Butterfly* "a very beautiful story," even after Song debunks its ethnocentrism. But he remains psychologically confused about the meaning of what he "sees"

in the reenacted or summarized scenes from Puccini's opera that he introduces and even, for the benefit of the audience, acts in. This play within the play, this primal scene, contains clues to Gallimard's psychosexual profile, notably his narcissism, his sadism, and his Oedipal fixation.

Freud suggests that the child who witnesses or overhears parental intercourse (or merely fantasizes this activity) thinks the father is hurting the mother.[16] This perception complicates the child's desire to replace the rival parent: the child may construe sex in wholly sadistic terms.[17] Gallimard seems to suffer from precisely this misperception and perverted desire. His first sexual experience, for example, was with the aggressive "Isabelle," whose rhapsodic screams would tend to correlate to an infantile sadistic theory on the part of her partner. The experience was also attended by hints of a terrible punishment: she tore the branches off trees, he feared his legs would fall off. When she screamed "I'm coming," Gallimard "thought she meant someone was actually coming" (p. 34).

The fear of castration implicit in these images reveals a failure to resolve Oedipal conflict, and one understands in terms of this fixation the larger psychosexual dimensions of the drama he enacts—whether his own or, analeptically, Puccini's. One resolves the Oedipal dilemma by identifying with the father and renouncing one's sexual claims on the mother. Gallimard gets only half of the formula right. By cloaking it in a plausible paradigm, the Pinkerton/Butterfly story, he attempts to satisfy the forbidden Oedipal wish. Seeking to be a Pinkerton, he seeks to identify with the father. But he also seeks to possess his Butterfly, i.e., the mother. Though the two ambitions are mutually exclusive, the desire for the mother is the more heavily interdicted, and the frustration results in what Freud calls a "narcissistic scar."[18] The ego, its object choice forbidden, invests libidinal energies exclusively in itself. Gallimard's narcissism dictates that he can love only himself or versions of himself. He embraces such a narcissistic self-projection in Song and in the Danish student Renee, with whom he has an abortive affair.

The protagonist of *M. Butterfly* bears an androgynous name, and Hwang underscores the point by introducing into the action an alter ego whose name—not by accident—is merely a feminized version of the hero's. The affair between Rene and Renee provides a further illustration of the hero's narcissism, his inability to love anything outside himself. In Jungian terms, she is the anima he cannot integrate. Threatening to subvert the gender hierarchy on which he depends, she represents a type of femininity that makes Gallimard intensely uncomfortable. Her frank language and uninhibited discussion of the penis seem to strike Gallimard as castrative, and he

desperately needs to perceive women, like Asians, as having always already suffered a preemptive castration. The presence of Renee also complicates the drama by reaffirming that the play's main character, veteran of a twenty-year affair with a man, is in fact heterosexual.[19] Gallimard's psychosexual dysfunction, in other words, is so powerful as to circumvent even sexual preference.

One can conclude this psychoanalytic spelunking with a few last manifestations of Gallimard's arrested development. They are not hard to spot, for he seems to exhibit his psychological deformity with every word and gesture. Thus he likes to "celebrate," with Marc or Ambassador Toulon, "the fact that we're still boys" (p. 46). Much given to what Freud called *Schaulust* (sometimes translated as scopophilia), he remains uncomfortable with adult women—especially those who return his gaze. He marries, late, a woman older than himself, renouncing love at the altar (p. 14). Yet the collocation of "older woman" and "renouncing love" patently attempts to defuse anxiety stemming from what, at the fantasy level, is a forbidden possession of the mother. His reading of *Madama Butterfly* and his relationship with Song, finally, reveal his inability to resolve his fixation. He sees in Puccini's fifteen-year-old Butterfly a version of the mother as victim of the father, wounded quite literally by a version of the paternal phallus (whether the sword-phallus of Butterfly's father or the literal phallus of her husband). His surrogate Butterfly, Song, claims to hate "her" father, and Gallimard, a study in narcissistic wish-fulfillment, will look to this surrogate (his meeting with whom he describes simultaneously with mention of his marriage to the older Helga) as to a mother, someone whose love will be unconditional and nurturing. His bizarre failure to raise questions about the position in which they have intercouse ("I suppose he *might* have wondered why I was always on my stomach," says Song, p. 82) stems from an unconscious desire to avoid the forbidden vaginal possession—and its punishment.

The Butterfly Story As Myth

Oedipal themes and polyphiloprogenitive texts also figure in the myth on which Puccini and perforce Hwang structure their dramas. The Eros and Psyche story moved Keats, one recalls, to structure a poem, the "Ode to Psyche," as itself the offspring of what the poet "sees" in the forest: Eros and Psyche about their intimate business. As for the Oedipal complications, the mythological Eros, according to some accounts, is himself the product of an incestuous union of Zeus and his daughter Aphrodite, and Bruno Bettelheim notes an incestuous love for Eros on the part of his mother.[20] Yet ultimately the Eros and Psyche myth points a resolution of the Oedipal

problem: Eros, a mere child in the standard iconography, is here presented as a youth old enough to evade or renounce Oedipal snares and marry. In its modern versions, however, as the preceding will have made clear, the story becomes twisted and warped: Psyche becomes an infantile version of the venereal mother while Eros, courting a bogus maturity, weds only Thanatos. Nevertheless, one recognizes in this core myth a ground, once again, for the mutual enhancement of symbiotic meanings.

The story of the long-suffering and preternaturally selfless wife goes back at least to Boccaccio and Petrarch, who furnished the models for "The Clerk's Tale"—that of Patient Griselda—in Chaucer. But all such stories contain elements of the myth of Eros and Psyche, which Bruno Bettelheim identifies as an analogue to or ancestor of a large number of "beast-groom" fairy tales, including "Beauty and the Beast," "The Frog Prince," and "Bluebeard." These stories concern infantile perceptions of marriage, and most end happily. But the Butterfly story, like "Bluebeard," reverses the pattern—it is Eros and Psyche in a tragic mode. In considering the presence of this myth in Puccini and Hwang, one encounters archetypes of death and abortive rebirth within three kinds of marriage: individual, cultural, and textual. The rebirth proves abortive in all but the last.

The story of Eros and Psyche, one recalls, centers on the heroine, youngest of three royal daughters, who so intimidates young men with her beauty that none will offer for her in marriage. An oracle tells her parents that they must leave her out on a hillside (one thinks of the hillside overlooking Nagasaki in *Madama Butterfly*), so that her fated bridegroom, a great and hideous serpent, can carry her away. The god Eros, enraptured by Psyche, has her wafted by Zephyr to a splendid palace he has prepared. There, as her husband, he visits her nightly, but he forbids her ever to look on him. Though content with her situation and her strange husband, Psyche pleads for a visit from her sisters. This granted, she hears from them that her husband's reticence is surely owing to his deformity. Jealous of her good fortune, they persuade their sister that her spouse poses a terrible danger to her and provide her with the means to deliver herself: a lantern with which to behold the monster, a dagger with which to behead it. When Psyche lights the lantern and sees her husband, she is overcome with his beauty, but burning oil from the lamp falls on Eros, wounding him. He identifies himself, reproaches her for her faithlessness, and leaves her, supposedly forever. Prevented from committing suicide, Psyche must undergo terrible trials, including a descent to the underworld, before Eros relents. When Zeus grants Psyche immortality she rejoins Eros, and presently they become parents of the child Pleasure.

The meaning of the myth is fairly straightforward: it concerns the problematic relationship between physical love and the spiritual faculty—the difficulties, as Robert Graves says, of moving beyond sex to intellectual love.[21] Bettelheim agrees but offers a more varied reading, according to which the story, like "Beauty and the Beast," gives expression to a variety of sexual anxieties. A symbolic castration, for example, figures in the intended beheading: revenge for defloration by that phallic "serpent." Bettelheim suggests, too, that the story reflects perceptions that, however pleasurable the nighttime activities, sex alone does not a marriage make. In the daytime certain resentments and fears return, especially if the husband treats the wife as merely a marital adjunct. In its depiction of postmarital trials, notably the descent into the underworld, the story develops the idea—a favorite D. H. Lawrence theme—that in marriage one must experience death and rebirth. Thus the story sketches the course of a necessary marital maturation, the acceptance of individual integrity on both sides.[22]

The idea of a monster who claims for his bride a supernally beautiful young woman and subsequently subjects her to assorted torments recurs in *Madama Butterfly*. Psyche, the soul in ancient art and lore, came to be depicted as a butterfly in the south of Italy as early as the fifth century, b.c.e. The myth of Psyche and her consort lends itself readily to the purposes of an Italian composer drawn to depict an archetypal male-female relationship. Thus Pinkerton's extraordinary hold on Butterfly's affections resembles the way Eros—sexual desire—was understood by the ancients to operate on the individual mind. Indeed, according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary,* the soul or psyche was said to be "the seat of passions" (an idea the myth gives direct expression to). Eros embodies sexual desire and its attendant irrationality; thus Hesiod declares that he "loosens the limbs and damages the mind." The attributes of Pinkerton, moreover, recall those of Eros, who is depicted in classical literature as unscrupulous, callous, and unpredictable. Anacreon's Eros tramples flowers, and Pinkerton does so figuratively in an opera libretto filled with floral imagery, some of it in the most familiar arias, like "Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegio" and "Addio fiorito asil." Butterfly herself is repeatedly characterized in floral terms—as Verbena blossom, as "A flower, a flower," as "that lovely flower of a girl."

A number of minor details in the opera also reveal the presence of the myth. Butterfly is estranged from her family, her world, and its customs when she marries Pinkerton, and similarly Psyche must give up her family and the world she has known. Butterfly's cousins, who denounce Pinkerton as unhandsome, a poor match, are Puccini's version of Psyche's jealous sisters. Butterfly does not have to sort different kinds of seed or procure

golden fleece (as Psyche is obliged to do), but she does bear a child alone, suffer in solitude for three years, run out of money, fend off an unwanted suitor, and bear the mockery of those around her. Where Psyche is helped by ants (who sort the seeds), a little reed, and an eagle, Butterfly has her faithful companion Suzuki. Butterfly's vigil spent looking through a hole in a shoji screen, finally, is her dark night of the soul, a night sea journey that is the symbolic equivalent of a descent into the underworld.

An ironic, modernist version of the Eros and Psyche myth, *Madama Butterfly* does not eventuate in wedded bliss and immortality, nor does the fated couple produce a child named Pleasure. Butterfly introduces her child by Pinkerton as Trouble but says that when his father returns, his name will be Joy (in *Comus,* Milton imagines Psyche producing twins: Youth and Joy). Madama Butterfly's story, unlike Psyche's, ends tragically, with Butterfly's turning on herself the blade with which her father before her had committed suicide. In other words, instead of the symbolic castration of the husband urged on Psyche in the original story, this version imagines the heroine as obliged to turn on herself the violence that cannot, for valid psychological reasons (according to one theory of suicide), be directed at its appropriate target—the perfidious Pinkerton. Prior to killing herself behind a screen, Butterfly starts to use the knife on her throat, as if to carry out the attack planned against the spouse in Eros and Psyche. But behind the screen, as noted previously, the original gesture gives way to the equally symbolic penetrating—of womb by phallic sword.

In *M. Butterfly,* whose three acts mirror the three scenes of the Puccini opera, these parallels become intriguingly convoluted. Less inhibited than a Catholic turn-of-the-century composer, Hwang resurrects the ancient association of Eros with homosexual as well as heterosexual love, and he recapitulates the myth of Eros and Psyche—sometimes with greater fidelity than does Puccini. The pervasive androgyny, however, makes assignment of the Eros and Psyche roles problematic. Basically, though, Hwang tells a story of a *male* Psyche whose nominally female but actually male Eros must remain unseen—and apotropaically "castrated." By the same token, the trials of Psyche and the wound of Eros are distributed between the two: Song must spend years in a reeducation commune as a result of the Cultural Revolution, and Gallimard must go on trial and become the laughingstock of the world. His imprisonment corresponds to Psyche's descent into the underworld.

The motif of invisibility, which plays directly into Hwang's larger purpose, receives the greatest emphasis here. The entire play turns on Gallimard's willingness always to encounter his Eros (or Melusina) in the dark.

But sooner or later, according to the myth, the terrible serpent must be confronted. Thus the play details a striptease drawn out over thirty years. This stripping theme is introduced in Marc's fevered invitation to a collegiate bacchanal ("Before you know it, every last one of them—they're stripped and splashing around my pool" [p. 8]) and in Renee's remark that "the reason we fight wars is because we wear clothes" (p. 55). Like Carlyle, who in *Sartor Resartus* broods on clothing and what it covers to develop a sociology, a metaphysics, and a theology, Hwang probes cultural and psychosexual realities in references to clothing and its removal. His play, then, tells the story of a person whose easily circumvented desire to strip a lover "reveals" a profound disinclination to encounter a complicating or unmanageable reality. Stripping—aborted on one occasion, insisted on on another—is at the heart of the play, and Hwang's insistence on an erotics of epistemology complicates and enriches the familiar theme of appearance and reality. What does it mean to suggest that one's desire to possess and one's desire to know might be at odds? "There should be nothing false between us" (p. 39), says Gallimard. Ironically, all is false between himself and his lover, and in the end he will admit, "all I loved was the lie" (p. 89).

A favorite Western myth equates shame and knowledge, but this, too, is debunked by Hwang. Like John Barth, whose fictions often *celebrate* the loss of innocence, Hwang argues that innocence, and the illusion that attends it, is a major source of the blindness that, as he says in the afterword, afflicts "nations and lovers," precluding mutuality between peoples and between sexes. One does not oversimplify to say that the thirty years' war in Indochina—a whole culture's descent into the underworld—was the product of too much innocence. Thus the author describes the play as "a plea to all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common and equal ground we share as human beings" (p. 100).

Beyond the polarities of nations and gender, the story is also a negative fable of personal integration and the problematics of rebirth in the relationship with the Other. Again, Eros and Psyche subverted. Bettelheim affirms and Hwang intuits that the opposition between self and Other is also a hierarchy, also in need of deconstruction. Thus Bettelheim controverts the reading of stories like Eros and Psyche as tendentious lessons in masculine and feminine behavior. "Recently it has been claimed," says Bettelheim,

> that the struggle against childhood dependency and for becoming oneself in fairy tales is frequently described differently for the girl than for the boy, and that this is the result of sexual stereotyping. Fairy tales

> do not render such one-sided pictures. Even when a girl is depicted as turning inward in her struggle to become herself, and a boy as aggressively dealing with the external world, these two *together* symbolize the two ways in which one has to gain selfhood: through learning to understand and master the inner as well as the outer world. In this sense the male and female heroes are again projections onto two different figures of two (artificially) separated aspects of one and the same process which *everybody* has to undergo in growing up. While some literal-minded parents do not realize it, children know that, whatever the sex of the hero, the story pertains to their own problems. (226)

This idea of mastering the inner and outer world, of developing two complementary sides of the self, figures in Gallimard's experience. Gallimard cannot recognize the Other, which he wants to master and keep at a distance, as something that exists within himself. He exemplifies the ethnocentric tendency to identify the West with masculinity and the East with its subservient Other—a tendency that precludes the desiderated integration. Gallimard's "Butterfly" is himself, and the point is at once an indictment of his blindness and the tragic intimation of the terms in which he might once have aspired to psychic health. "Not physical man, but spiritual man must be reborn to become ready for the marriage of sexuality and wisdom," says Bettelheim. "This is represented by Psyche having to enter the underworld and return from it; wedding of the two aspects of man requires a rebirth" (p. 293).

The drama of integration and problematic rebirth in *M. Butterfly* dictates that its main character should have a name like Rene, which, ironically enough, means "reborn." But Rene's rebirth is unmasked as spiritually retrograde. He is reborn in his passion for Song—but the illusory nature of his passion's object renders his vita nuova merely pathological. In the end, profoundly alienated from reality itself, Gallimard lurches toward an absolute dysfunction that approaches madness.

The only rebirths not aborted here, as I suggested at the outset, are the artistic ones, whereby the grub fiction of Long and Belasco becomes an operatic chrysalis and a butterfly of a play. In its final stage the fiction becomes self-aware, quite sophisticated in its recognition of intertextuality or, more narrowly, the role art plays in the production of more art. Thus, too, the play promotes an awareness of the role art plays in the shaping and reflection of cultural attitudes. In its examination of Western attitudes toward the East, "good at art" (p. 83), it subverts the idea that art itself is feminine and Other. Like the play, whose "soundtrack" blends Western

music—Puccini—and the authentic musical idiom of the Chinese opera, Song embodies art's catholicity of gender and culture: he sings, dances, acts in both Eastern and Western opera. His supreme accomplishment, of course, is his long-running *Darstellung* as one man's Butterfly: "I'm an artist, Rene. You were my greatest . . . acting challenge" (p. 63). The play, in other words, makes an argument for the role of audience complicity, of "reader-response," in the realization of any artistic performance. It even glances at the fate of art when its audience breaks faith, refuses to embrace traditional conventions and meanings. During the Cultural Revolution, venerable Chinese cultural institutions came under attack—and one sees Red Guards parodying the opera and tormenting Song, its representative artist.

Might Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* suffer a similar fate in its own cultural milieu? More to the point, does the frankly hostile guest actually discredit its host? Not, I think, if symbiosis be understood to compel the kind of reevaluation that all classic texts must periodically undergo. Such reevaluations should not, however, involve the exercise of generational chauvinism—the retroactive indictment of artists for being products of their age, subscribers to a different *episteme*. It is this generational chauvinism—not symbiosis—that generates complaints regarding the alleged racism of *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Magic Flute,* the alleged anti-Semitism of Shakespeare or Mencken, and the alleged insensitivity to female experience and values of writers like Lawrence and Hemingway.

I have suggested that symbiosis throws into relief the cultural distinctions between different historical moments (in the Hwang play one encounters a fiction at nearly a century's remove from its symbiont: *Madama Butterfly* premiered in 1904; Hwang's play saw publication in 1988), but I remain persuaded that the relationship between symbionts, however disparate the guest's self-conscious values from those of the host, tends toward the mutualistic. Bloom's "strong poets," drawn to vie with the most potent of their predecessors, do not destroy them, like Cronos and the other titans castrating Uranus; like Prometheus rather, they leave undiminished the power they successfully dare. By the same token, the guest author under consideration here paradoxically challenges and subverts without destroying. As Pope says, "Like gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound."

7 ADRIAN & FRANCISCO ARE GAY

Auden Reading Shakespeare

"It's surprising that there have been so few imitations of Shakespeare," W. H. Auden once remarked.[1] The point is less valid, perhaps, after Tom Stoppard, but as Auden himself demonstrates, Shakespeare can bring out the best in those who follow or challenge him. Where Stoppard, with *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* his symbiotic matrices, turns Shakespearean tragedy inside-out, W. H. Auden achieves comparable and perhaps greater heights by appropriating the Shakespearean romance: he conceives "The Sea and the Mirror," according to his subtitle, as a "commentary" on *The Tempest*. Some critics consider "The Sea and the Mirror" this poet's masterpiece.[2] Unlike Stoppard in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead,* Auden does not pointedly elevate the most inconsequential characters of his host text to centers of the action. Adrian and Francisco, as indistinguishable as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, merit only a couplet here. For Stoppard, the symbiosis involves a significant Oedipal dimension, both in the choice of play to rewrite and in the climactic moment with a symbolically inadequate phallus (the stabbing of the Player with the prop knife). With Auden, by contrast, the symbiosis becomes another occasion for him to express his conviction of art's ultimate frivolity vis-à-vis a spiritual imperative. Auden's terrible father, in other words, is not Shakespeare but God.

But does Auden challenge the Bard, or merely collaborate? *Diffère-t-il?* Bloom's categories of misreading offer little help in answering these questions, though what Bloom calls *tessera* or completion of the precursor's work would seem to figure in Auden's emphasis on the religious element, explicit in the original only in Prospero's remarks in the epilogue:

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself and frees all faults. (13–18)[3]

One recognizes, too, an element of *kenosis* or discontinuity with the precursor in Auden's elevation of Caliban to moralizer of the whole. The prominence of Caliban in the Auden scheme implies the inversion of a Shakespearean hierarchy, though not so radical and elaborate an inversion as the one undertaken by Stoppard with *Hamlet*. In emphasizing the centrality of Caliban, however, Auden merely anticipates the critic Frank Kermode, who calls Caliban the "ground" or "core of the play . . . the natural man against whom the cultivated man is measured."[4] Thus Auden modestly contrives to imply that his Caliban was Shakespeare's all along. Too, he declines to compete with Shakespeare as dramatist. He produces a series of linked dramatic monologues rather than a play.

On the other hand, he does compete with a more proximate precursor. T. S. Eliot, in the 1930 poem "Marina," had placed his stamp on the idea of a dramatic monologue derived from a Shakespearean moment. A decade later, Auden challenges him with a more elaborate Shakespearean symbiosis. Like "Marina," which purports to be the thoughts of the aged Pericles before the miraculous recovery of his daughter, "The Sea and the Mirror" is based on a late play, a romance. For the most part, moreover, it is set, like the Eliot poem, at sea. But Auden, unlike Eliot, feels the need of several speakers. He doubts the efficacy of either soliloquy or dramatic monologue in isolation, notwithstanding the famous examples of the one in Shakespeare and of the other in Browning and Frost, as well as in Eliot. In his essay "Balaam and His Ass," Auden remarks: "To present artistically a human personality in its full depth, its inner dialectic, its self-disclosure and self-concealment, through the medium of a single character is almost impossible."[5]

Auden operates in a crowded field of borrowers and thieves from *The Tempest*. This play, something of a literary template, has always courted symbiosis, perhaps because, as Stephen Orgel points out, "the sense of unfinished business is . . . the life of the play. Prospero's is a story for which Shakespeare provides no ending."[6] From Eliot and Sylvia Plath, who invoke the name of Shakespeare's spirit of song in collections of poems, to the makers of the clever 1956 science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet,* this

story has quickened imaginations and invited further declension of its protean themes. As John Updike has pointed out, the figure of Prospero stalks through much of the fiction of Kurt Vonnegut.[7] Indeed, as I have pointed out before in this study, Vonnegut's late novel *Galápagos* invites reading as a postapocalyptic and parodic *Tempest*. Similarly John Fowles, in *The Magus,* gives the story an existential spin, and, more recently, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* concerns a Prospero who is black and female. But the chief attraction for artists drawn to Shakespeare's play has always—or at least since Jonson (who sneers at the "servant-monster" in the induction to *Bartholomew Fair*)—been the figure of Caliban. In works by West Indian writers like George Lamming and Aimé Césaire, Caliban embodies the suffering—and the legitimate anger—of all who have been displaced or enslaved by colonialism. In *Une Tempête,* Césaire's rewriting of the Shakespeare text, Caliban enters speaking a single word: "Uhuru!"[8] The playwright names as characters "those of Shakespeare," with "two supplementary specifications": Ariel is Mulatto, Caliban black. Césaire also introduces into the play Eshu, the West African trickster deity that, as Henry Louis Gates has shown, appears in a variety of forms—among them the Signifying Monkey—in the New World.[9] Eshu joins and scandalizes the classical deities that appear in Prospero's masque (Gates would say he "Signifies upon" their tiresome and predictable glorification of Prospero). His obscene antics give the lie to their Apollonian decorum and further the cause of Caliban, whose song of liberty provides the last words heard by the audience.

Caliban is similarly subversive in his modern, Eurocentric incarnations. He becomes a savage theologian in Browning's "Caliban on Setebos," a revolutionary in a closet drama by Renan, a psychopathic clerk in Fowles's *The Collector,* and a kind of ecological Christ in Rachel Ingalls's *Mrs. Caliban*. For Oscar Wilde, finally, Caliban's is the face of bourgeois morality: "The nineteenth-century dislike of Realism," says Wilde in the preface to *Dorian Gray,* "is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass." Typically, Wilde inverts the figure: "The nineteenth-century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass."[10]

Wilde also says here, "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors." Like so many of Wilde's seemingly lighthearted insights, this one, highly relevant to a discussion of literary symbiosis, can make the mind reel at unexpected depths. Wilde's apothegm is about half a century ahead of its time, anticipating as it does Wolfgang Iser's observation that "the manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror."[11] In the idea

of the spectator mirrored one also glimpses something essential to Auden's symbiotic undertaking. As a "spectator" of *The Tempest,* Auden must see himself mirrored therein, but unlike other spectators he leaves a record of the encounter: "The Sea and the Mirror." Magnanimously he includes the other spectators in the image, for Caliban's speech, with which "The Sea and the Mirror" climaxes, begins with an artful assumption of the responsibility to speak for the audience—to "mirror" its aesthetic and moral concerns. The mirroring, then, is at once individual—one poet's response to *The Tempest*—and collective, and as such it becomes a whole culture's response to the art of the past. At either level, one encounters an act of writing—or, rather, rewriting—that is actually reading. Thus "The Sea and the Mirror," a reading in every sense of the word, invites an analysis that takes theories of reading into account. Indeed, the part of Caliban's speech in which he analyzes the responses of the audience touches on certain of the sociological and historical issues that would figure in European reception theory (Jauss, Iser, even Benjamin) and on certain of the questions of individual psychology that would figure in American theories of response and "affective stylistics" (Bleich, Holland, Fish). Though Auden does not anticipate the view of the play as an allegory of colonialism (most effectively argued in George Lamming's 1960 collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*), he does develop his own idiosyncratic brand of subversiveness.

Symbiosis naturally calls for a two- or three-tiered response analysis. A guest text, again, is at once "one reader reading" and a reflection of one age reading another age. On the one hand, reading a text becomes a projection of one's own psychology. Auden's reading—his poem, that is—should be gauged first against several personal indices: his religious convictions, his prose criticism, his characteristic symbolism, and his derogation of poetry, which, as he says in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," "makes nothing happen."[12] On the other hand, a text like *The Tempest* is read against what Jauss calls the "horizon of expectations," which can change from reader to reader and certainly from era to era. "A literary work," says Jauss, "is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period."[13]

Auden's text, then, becomes more than a personal reading by embodying the response of a twentieth-century audience to a seventeenth-century play. Although New Historicist readings of Shakespeare caution against generalizations about "the Renaissance mind," one can still perhaps say that Shakespeare's audience, which accepted the authority of dukes and the divine right of kings, responded to the representation, in *The Tempest,* of

an always morally repugnant usurpation. Perhaps, too, with the burgeoning exploration of the new world and the emergence of "new science" from the beaker of medieval alchemy, they responded to the drama of science and civilization shaping brute nature to the needs of a nascent European order. But as audiences change, so, strangely, does the "mirroring" text. "For it is not a question of representing the written works in relation to their time," says Walter Benjamin, "but of bringing to representation the time that knows them—that is our time—in the time when they originated. Thus literature becomes an organon of history and the task of literary history is to make it this—and not to make written works the material of history."[14] In Benjamin's phrase, Auden "brings to representation the time that knows" Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in a poetically critical reading of great range, depth, and subtlety.

A final introductory point. As suggested in the first chapter of this study, and as may have become plain in succeeding chapters, literary symbiosis can be described and evaluated from a number of theoretical perspectives. In a concluding chapter, I will recapitulate at once the variety of symbiosis and the variety of critical approaches it dictates in a discussion of some further examples of symbiotic poetry. If, in the meantime, I have declined to rotate any given text—or pair of texts—through all of the various critical paradigms, I have tried from chapter to chapter to sketch the full range of critical response to symbiosis. In large measure, these responses have been dictated by the fact that symbiosis itself always involves the critical reading of host texts by guest authors. But while trying out a text or texts in the theoretical kaleidoscope would promote only hermeneutic dizziness, one can judiciously allow one theory to enhance or extend or modify another—so long as such eclecticism illuminates the works in hand. Of course there is considerable relativity among the various critical paradigms, which tend naturally to complement each other, to be all saying, in various ways, the same things. Though some contemporary theories—the Marxist, the feminist—attempt to preserve essentialist meanings and others deny absolute meaning absolutely, nearly all center on language or, more broadly, systems and structures of signification. All recognize that meaning is constructed, not given, and all try to bring to consciousness the ways in which language (or our "horizon of expectations" or "structures" or "culture" or "*episteme*" or "economic paradigms" or the "Symbolic Order") speaks its speakers rather than the other way around. One should be able, then, without going astray in an assessment of "The Sea and the Mirror" as reading, to adduce at times the insights peculiar to theories of language and psychology nomi-

nally outside the purview of response theory. Thus in what follows I shall occasionally touch on some of the Lacanian and Derridean dimensions of Shakespeare as read by Auden.

Critical Misreading

Since writer and reader remain always to some degree at odds, a single "correct" reading of any given text does not exist. One can even argue that no reading can really be incorrect. Moreover, reading is always potentially deconstructive. A reader constructs a text by filling in its gaps, by selecting and responding to details subjectively perceived as striking or interesting. These one groups for consistency; others one omits or neglects. The details selected—as all teachers of literature know—will as likely as not be aporias. As a result of this kind of selectivity, not to mention more conscious and more sophisticated opinions about Shakespeare's theme and technique, Auden's reading of *The Tempest* questions what the play ostensibly says about exile, isolation, and social reordering. Shakespeare's characters escape an island and restore justice to the social order; in Auden's version, the characters return from exile only to wrestle with a psychological and spiritual islanding. One of the striking things about these complementary versions of the basic *Tempest* diagesis is that the Shakespearean intertext preempts *Auden's* standard theme. Some of Auden's reaction to the host text, then, may derive from the frustrated recognition that the precursor "got there first."

Indeed, to read Auden is to encounter a text that defers an encounter with—and defers *to*—another text. A guest text, in other words, is itself a language, and like a language it at once differs from and defers access to its referent. Similarly, every "character" (the word implies a writing) in "The Sea and the Mirror" is a signifier that cannot be made perfectly congruent with its Shakespearean signified. This *différance* figures also in the artist's relation to the predecessor, which resembles that of infant to mirror image in the fundamental schema of Lacanian psychology. The recognition that image and self are not identical, which constitutes a primal sundering or castration, results in a perpetual lack, a never realizable desire that one should keep in mind in the course of any tour through "The Sea and the Mirror," any reading of Auden's reading of *The Tempest*.

Before proceeding, some description of the host text. Who, after all, can remember the differences among Shakespeare's Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and Alonso? In brief, then: Prospero, rightful ruler of Milan, dwells in exile on an island with his daughter Miranda, his monstrous ser-

vant Caliban, and the sprite Ariel. A powerful mage, he arranges for a tempest to shipwreck on his island those responsible for usurping his dukedom: his villainous brother Antonio and Antonio's coconspirator Alonso, king of Naples. Along with them come some mariners and various members of Alonso's family and household, including his son Ferdinand, who promptly falls in love with Miranda; his brother Sebastian, who aspires to do some usurping of his own; his counselor Gonzalo, who had sympathized with and helped Prospero; his "drunken butler" Stephano; the jester Trinculo; and two attendant lords, Adrian and Francisco.

One cannot so easily summarize "The Sea and the Mirror." The monologues of Auden's poem all take place shortly after the conclusion of Shakespeare's action; the sequence of poems constitutes a continuation of Shakespeare's play as closet drama. Here one encounters a melancholy Prospero packing and taking leave of Ariel. Other characters one encounters at sea, en route for Naples and Milan. Caliban and Ariel speak last, less from the familiar island than from some metafictional plane.

In terms of Auden's characteristic iconography, leaving an island is a positive act. One of his best-known poems (a sestina, like "Sebastian") ends with the poet's urging that "we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands."[15] An island, for Auden, is a metaphor for antisocial isolation—especially for that of the artist, who is not exempt from the responsibility to "build cities." But in the lectures of *The Enchafèd Flood,* which concern sea imagery among the romantic poets (midway between Shakespeare's "classicism" and his own late modernism), Auden implies that the ocean and a vessel on it are for him rich in meaning. He notes that the sea is a dangerous and hostile environment, and he contemplates the heroism of those who leave an insular security behind to explore or quest. He adduces, finally, G. Wilson Knight's 1932 book *The Shakespearian Tempest.* Summarizing Knight, Auden remarks: "In the last plays," including *The Tempest,* "not only do the sea and the sea voyage play a much more important role, but also a different one. The sea becomes the place of purgatorial suffering: through separation and apparent loss, the characters disordered by passion are brought to their senses and the world of music and marriage is made possible. . . . The putting to sea. . . . is a pain which must be accepted as cure, the death that leads to rebirth, in order that the abiding city may be built."[16]

Auden's poem, elegiac in tone, chronicles the eve of *nóstos,* the mythic return from exile and voyaging. Action past, reflection occupies the present moment. Though the emotions felt by the characters include the exhilaration of vindicatory triumph, the emphasis lies more on the meaning of variously harrowing and humbling and chastening experiences. But if the

poem's setting—largely maritime—implies a further experience of "purgatorial suffering," the purgatory is now psychological.

In developing the psychological and spiritual Angst of selected characters, Auden essays a serious version of that favorite device of parodists, satirists, and cynics from Henry Fielding to *Mad* magazine: how do things go for Snow White and the Prince in that allegedly blissful "ever-after"[17] of which Antonio speaks? This symbiotic enterprise generates a number of questions. Does Auden's "commentary" function purely as critique—a more narrowly focused version of the kind of thing Pope does in "An Essay on Criticism"? Does he, that is, merely render poetically his judgment that Shakespeare left *The Tempest* "in a mess," as he once remarked[18]—or does he, more ambitiously, resolve Shakespeare's themes as he advances Shakespeare's action? Does he appropriate—and "misread"—Shakespeare to promote his own artistic ends? Does he offer some definitive twentieth-century reading of the play—a poetic essay for inclusion in the *Tempest* volume of *Bloom's Shakespeare Though the Ages*?

Answer: all of the above.

Auden's interest in Shakespeare's play did not stem from simple veneration, and the critic errs who declares that this poet's "reading of *The Tempest* . . . does not depart greatly from conventional ones."[19] One ought, then, to preface a further consideration of "The Sea and the Mirror" as an act of critical reading by considering what Auden says about the play in his actual prose criticism. Though clearly respectful of the powerful imagination that summoned up Prospero and Ariel and Caliban, he points out that the conclusion of the play is only superficially harmonious and affirmative. Prospero's brother Antonio and King Alonso's brother Sebastian, the major social villains of the piece, are "forgiven" but not comedically reintegrated. Prospero's political and parental successes do not seem particularly satisfying to him. There is a curiously joyless element in his triumph, a residuum of something like bitterness. "*The Tempest* ends much more sourly," says Auden, than the other romances: "The only wrongdoer who expresses genuine repentance is Alonso," and Prospero "brings about" a "victory of justice" that "seems rather a duty than a source of joy to himself."[20] These remarks, from "Music in Shakespeare," echo similar statements in "Balaam and His Ass": "in *The Tempest* both the repentance of the guilty and the pardon of the injured seem more formal than real."[21] Auden, in other words, is strongly disinclined to construe as innovative the dramaturgy of Shakespeare's late play or the characterization of its protagonist. Not for him the kind of explanation offered by Stephen Orgel:

> Shakespeare, in the development of his comedy, increasingly finds the promised restorations and marriages of comic conclusions inadequate to reconcile the conflicts that comedy has generated. This is not to say that Shakespearian comedy does not end happily, but that its happy ending does not exhaust the energies of the drama."[22]

Auden wants closure, resolution. He rejects the idea of a Faust-like Prospero unable to say to the moment, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön," nor is he willing to imagine a Shakespeare who, seeing that fulfillment always retreats before us, remembering that appetite can be sated only briefly at best, and knowing even that, as Auden's Prospero says, "most desires end up in stinking ponds" (p. 313), simply expresses an insight found in systems as divergent as Buddhism and Lacanian psychoanalysis—an insight grasped sooner or later by the wise of every persuasion. Auden refuses to consider the possibility that Prospero, ostensibly achieving his heart's desire, is too wise to pretend to a spurious absoluteness of fulfillment.

Eliot remarks in his essay on John Ford that "a dramatic poet cannot create characters of the greatest intensity of life unless his personages, in their reciprocal actions and behaviour in their story, are somehow dramatizing, but in no obvious form, an action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet."[23] The qualification "in no obvious form" is of course central to the self-effacing poetics of Shakespeare, not to mention Eliot himself. In "The Sea and the Mirror," by the Auden who implies that in *The Tempest* Shakespeare falters in the transmuting of a personal animus into dramatic art, one may discern traces of a similar "action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet." One begins, thereby, to approach a better understanding of the poem's meaning, along with a more just assessment of its success as art.

Auden, a "strong" poet, boldly misreads his mighty precursor. He sees Shakespeare's protagonist as something of a prig. "One must admire Prospero because of his talents and his strength; one cannot possibly like him."[24] Prospero, according to this view, is smug intellect, forever assuming a superiority to—and reproving—base nature. For Auden, who anticipates the poststructuralist proposition that there is no such thing as human nature outside of culture, the relationship between Promethean Prospero and natural Caliban exhibits a spiritual miscalculation, a Manichaeism. Prospero—and presumably Shakespeare behind him—fails to recognize that Nature can only err at the bidding of Spirit. Thus Auden develops the idea that Caliban is an innocent corrupted by Prospero: "*The Tempest* seems

to me a manichaean work, not because it shows the relation of Nature to Spirit as one of conflict and hostility, which in fallen man it is, but because it puts the blame for this upon Nature and makes the Spirit innocent."[25]

Auden also contrasts Caliban with Ariel: "Over against Caliban, the embodiment of the natural, stands the invisible spirit of imagination, Ariel. (In a stage production, Caliban should be as monstrously conspicuous as possible, and indeed, suggest, as far as decency permits, the phallic. . . .)" Ariel should be invisible "except when he assumes a specific disguise at Prospero's order."[26] Similarly, "Ariel *is* song; when he is truly himself, he sings."[27]

Thus in Auden's *poetic* reading of *The Tempest,* Ariel proves well-nigh invisible, attenuated to an echo; thus, too, Caliban can assert that he and his mother, the witch Sycorax, are to be understood as distorted versions of classical deities. Is not the "deformed and savage slave" in reality

> no less a person than the nude august elated archer of our heaven, the darling single son of Her who, in her right milieu, is certainly no witch but the most sensible of all the gods, whose influence is as sound as it is pandemic, on the race-track no less than in the sleeping cars of the Orient Express, our great white Queen of Love herself? (p. 330)

To conceive of Caliban as Eros, as a bundle of amoral libidinous energy, does not strain plausibility—but Sycorax as Aphrodite? It is a point at which one sees clearly the idiosyncrasy and even inconsistency of one reader reading, for elsewhere Auden hints that the island of *The Tempest* is Circe's. The sardonic phrase with which "Antonio" begins—"As all the pigs have turned back into men" (p. 317)—reminds readers of a classical precedent for swinish behavior on an island, and, as Don Cameron Allen has suggested, the late Sycorax, Shakespeare's "blue-eyed hag" (I.ii.269), would appear to be the only candidate for the role of local Circe (barring Ariel in the masque).[28] Like his Homeric predecessor, Auden tends to construe witchcraft as eroticism: in *The Enchafèd Flood,* in some remarks on Tennyson's *Voyage of Maeldune,* he associates the Isle of Witches with sex.[29]

In his essays Auden characterizes the themes of *The Tempest* now as "a wrong done, repentance, penance and reconciliation,"[30] now as "injustice, plots, separation."[31] The characters of Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror" continue the action of *The Tempest* intellectually, and their speeches execute variations on yet more of Shakespeare's themes: just rule, good versus evil, love, mortality, and the complex relations of art, reality, religion, science, and the imagination. As Shakespeare's mirror, Auden also enhances the doublings of Shakespeare's play. He further moralizes the passing of

power in Naples from Alonso to Ferdinand. Thus does he develop his own characteristic theme of building the just city.

Auden produces one poem for each of Shakespeare's characters, and not only is each, with this poet's characteristic virtuosity, in a different form, but each is formally, thematically, and even historically appropriate to its speaker. Ferdinand, the Renaissance lover, expresses his feelings for Miranda in a sonnet cast, like some of Sir Philip Sidney's, in hexameters. Miranda's poem is a villanelle, traditionally a form expressive of pastoral simplicity. The vicious Antonio displays the reptiles of his mind in vitriolic and Dantesque terza rima. His allusion to Circe recalls Dante's Ulysses, himself a "false counselor" and overreacher. Stephano, the "drunken butler," offers a ballade to his belly, a meditation on the appetite that, for him, displaces every other dimension of concupiscence (the "lost thing" of the refrain suggests the male member, now cut off from view and permanently unstarched by booze). The attendant lords, wholly inconsequential in the original drama, merit only what John Fuller calls a "camp couplet":[32]

> Good little sunbeams must learn to fly,
> But it's madly ungay when the goldfish die. (p. 320)

In its diction this fairly giggles, and Auden hints that Adrian and Francisco, like Yeats's Hamlet and Lear (but with altogether different meaning) are "gay."

In his reading of Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Prospero, Auden waxes more serious, for he sees these characters as involved with political, moral, and religious issues close to his heart. Here again one encounters the personality of the reader shaping the text being read. Auden gives a voice to the disquiet of Prospero, the full iniquity of Antonio, and the remorse of the lesser villains—all aspects he felt that Shakespeare had neglected. He also resolves the comedic breakdown—the neglect of traditional forgiveness and social reintegration—by rendering the comedy "divine."

In the poem spoken by a broken Alonso, Auden reads his predecessor rather straightforwardly. Rather than misread, that is, he extrapolates. Recently confronted with his own corruption, having "come / Where thought accuses and feeling mocks" (p. 321), the king advises his son and successor Ferdinand to remain mindful of the seismic and entropic dangers to empire. He recurs over and over again to the sea and the desert—two kinds of wilderness, says Auden in *The Enchafèd Flood*[33]—that threaten to engulf "The Way of Justice" (p. 321). The desert signifies the inevitable decline of culture ("Remember . . . What griefs and convulsions startled Rome, / Ecbatana, Babylon," p. 321); the sea hints at the personal dereliction and

luxury that can swallow a prince, turning his throne over to "Shark and . . . octopus" (p. 321). But if Ferdinand falters, says Alonso, he must, like his father, learn from disaster, welcome the "dessication of . . . lust" and the "dissolution of . . . pride" (p. 322). Alonso implies that humility before the "whirlwind" may yet deliver an erring prince from the rocks. This figure of the whirlwind—traditionally associated with the divine supervision of and concern with human suffering and disaster—is the only hint here of a numinous reality that, elsewhere in the sequence, receives considerable emphasis.

One sees this religious element, for example, in Alonso's brother Sebastian, the would-be usurper who seems at first only the mirror image of Antonio's rapacity. Sebastian speaks in a sestina so elegant as perhaps to cast doubt on the remorse he expresses.[34] In Auden, as in Shakespeare, Sebastian is the second most vicious of the civilized characters. "Pallid" in comparison to Antonio, Sebastian functions as the measure of merely human wickedness. He evidently ends chastened, however, admitting himself "wicked still" but moved by mercy and thankful to a spiritually enabling "Exposure" and "Failure" (p. 323). Sebastian is erring, sinful, concupiscent, *fallen* humanity. Unlike Antonio, he is capable of redemption.

Gonzalo—in Shakespeare the wise and humane counselor, though mocked at times like a Polonius—speaks in a curious trochaic tetrameter. This Gonzalo is troubled, and his verse form—close to that which Shakespeare reserved for fairies and witches[35]—hints that his rationality, compared to the spiritual reality he seems to have glimpsed ("Had I trusted the Absurd," p. 319), is itself such stuff as dreams are made on:

> Even rusting flesh can be
> A simple locus now, a bell
> The Already There can lay
> Hands on if at any time
> It should feel inclined to say
> To the lonely—"Here I am,"
> To the anxious—"All is well." (p. 320)

Indeed, Auden's irony here extends to making Gonzalo's lines end catalectically, thereby providing an echo of an especially famous trochaic tetrameter celebration of the divine mystery: Blake's "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright." Only Gonzalo—the wise man after all—and Sebastian, the repentant transgressor, prove able to glimpse the spiritual truths adumbrated by the Stage Manager and Caliban. Prospero never catches on.

It bears repeating that Auden gives substance to these characters in verse

forms appropriate to their personae, their era and, for the most part, their continental origins. He largely avoids violation of decorum or the historical fiction (the reader remains in the Renaissance, poetically). Hence Master and Boatswain their rollicking tavern song, Trinculo his near-doggerel trimeter quatrains, Alonso his odelike three strophes of advice to his successor, and Ariel, in an epilogue, his elegantly rhymed love lyric to Caliban, which complements the prologue spoken by Auden's first persona here, the Stage Manager. Prospero, as the most advanced artist among these characters (yet one who has ostensibly renounced his art), speaks in lengthy and elegant "syllabic" verse, with intervals of traditional rhyme and cadence. The versification of the bulk of the Prospero poem is sufficiently uncommon (he counts syllables but counts all contiguous vowels as elided)[36] as to make it seem like free verse. Thus does an archetypal Renaissance man become something of an archetypal modernist for the nonce. Indeed, one recognizes not only the oft-asserted affinity between a Milan-bound Prospero and a Stratford-bound Shakespeare, but also a teasing parallel between the magus who renounces his art and the latter-day poet whose characteristic attitude toward his art is apologetic.

But Auden, whose own voice one hears more definitively in the Stage Manager and Caliban, distances himself from Prospero's intellectual hubris and obtunded spirituality. Shakespeare's Prospero attempts nobly to educate and civilize Caliban; Auden's seeks impiously to realize a divine prerogative: enjoyment of "absolute devotion" (p. 314). Shakespeare's Prospero thinks of Milan as a place "where / Every third thought shall be my grave" (V.i.310); Auden's looks to "briefly Milan, then earth" (p. 312) and knows his old age will be only a "silent passage / into discomfort" (p. 316). Monroe K. Spears sees Prospero as enlightened: "In Kierkegaardian terms, he is renouncing the aesthetic for the religious."[37] But in fact Prospero remains blind to the spiritual meaning of his misery. As Frederick P. W. McDowell observes, "In the Kierkegaardian sense, Prospero has insight at the aesthetic and moral levels, but lacks insight at the religious."[38] Auden seems, in fact, to imagine Prospero as already the unwitting victim of the grave spiritual peril named in Shakespeare's epilogue. As Kierkegaard says, "the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair."[39]

Acutely, Auden denies Prospero an insight into his brother's real significance to him. In Jungian terms, the evil brother is the shadow with which Prospero has failed to reckon, the part of himself he has failed to "integrate." Prospero offers only a vague self-reproach to himself for hatred of Antonio—and an equally vague claim that the bad blood be-

tween himself and his brother "could be cleared up" (p. 314). But Antonio knows better: "As I exist so you shall be denied," he observes. "Your all is partial, Prospero" (p. 318). The fraternal dynamic between Prospero and Antonio—one "sailing alone, out over seventy thousand fathoms" (p. 316), the other, equally "alone," sailing "waters" that "sailors do not know" (p. 323)—affords Auden the opportunity to illustrate the failures of the humanism advanced contemporaneously by Irving Babbitt and, later, by Jean-Paul Sartre. Prospero suffers, that is, the humanist's inability to conceptualize pure evil, here seen in his vicious brother, Antonio.

Neither brother qualifies as a fully reliable narrator, but Antonio at least understands that the evil he embraces (and, indeed, represents) forces art into existence: though Prospero break his staff, bury his book, and lay aside his mantle,

> they will soon reappear,
> Not even damaged: as long as I choose
>
> To wear my fashion, whatever you wear
> Is a magic robe; while I stand outside
> Your circle, the will to charm is still there. (p. 317)

Antonio is like John Gardner's Grendel, the symbol of all that drives humanity to "poetry, science, religion"[40]—all implied in Prospero's mantle, staff, and book. Antonio contributes a further assessment of himself in a series of codas to the poems of his fellow characters in the central sequence. Each extends the original insight: that Antonio represents something irreducibly, ineradicably, and unintegratably evil in the human heart. Antonio, then, is absolutely central to the poem, and the fact that he cannot be humanly reconciled and integrated intimates that a greater power than the human, some "Wholly Other Life" (p. 340), as Caliban says, must be invoked to deal with him.

With this observation, and the lengthy remarks that lead up to it, Auden concludes this exercise in creative misreading. Caliban, given his characterization as witty cynic, speaks naturally enough in prose (unlike the original, who speaks verse to his betters and prose in scenes of low comedy).[41] The voice, however, is again that of Auden himself at his most archly and teasingly periodic. Moreover, anyone who reads Auden's lucid nonpoetical writings —the essays in *The Dyer's Hand,* for example—will realize that for Caliban the poet has crafted not commonplace discursive prose but a Jamesian poetic language of great density and complexity. In Caliban the idea of reading Shakespeare becomes most explicit—and most idiosyncratic. In-

deed, Caliban implies that Shakespeare's play reads itself. By juxtaposing and contrasting Ariel and himself, Caliban suggests, Shakespeare meditates the actual antithesis between art and reality in a drama of consummate postmodern reflexivity. "Not content with inveigling Caliban into Ariel's kingdom" (bringing reality into art), says this wittier Caliban, Shakespeare also brought art into reality, "also let loose Ariel in Caliban's" (pp. 330, 331). George T. Wright provides a helpful gloss on these points:

> To introduce real life into art, as Shakespeare has done in creating Caliban, is intolerable, partly because it disturbs art's harmonious order, partly because it suggests the corresponding, horrible thought that such aesthetically pleasing ideals as fraternity, romance, and justice might be introduced into life.[42]

Auden implies that in the Caliban/Ariel antinomy, Shakespeare manages to represent art itself, "the spirit of song," alongside the intractable real—a real somehow more genuine, because contextualized, than the real encountered in art's supposedly routine representation of it (the holding of the mirror up to nature). The presence of the real in art, Auden says, is always qualified by the circumstances of its presentation.

One can, in overemphasizing the lengthy "Caliban to the Audience" section, risk missing what Auden does with the diverse personalities in the story. Like Shakespeare, he fans the characters out around Prospero and individualizes them with attention to their standing as lover, aging king, sage counselor, appetitive "mechanic," and so forth. But Auden, less interested in purely dramatic interaction, makes these traits and characteristics more schematic than Shakespeare. In certain ways he is closer to Jonson's drama of humours than to Shakespeare's psychological complexity. He also expresses character as poetic form and thereby foregrounds the artifice: Sebastian *is* a sestina, Miranda *is* a villanelle, Stephano *is* a ballade. What emerges is a dialogue, a drama, a parliament (to use the Chaucerian image) of poetic forms.

The forms, in fact, are a poetic language that speaks the characters. Each form, each character, is a kind of monad, an expression of that comprehensive, unbroachable separateness between persons that F. H. Bradley, Eliot's mentor, emphasized. Eliot's notes for *The Waste Land* include Bradley's painful thesis in brief:

> My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements

> alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.[43]

Each of the characters, in Auden's view, continues exiled in the island of self, but he focuses this idea in the single, definitive example of Antonio, whose voice the reader hears in the codas that punctuate and reductively mock each succeeding character's poem. "My nature is my own," he says. "My humour is my own." To the lover, eager for a mingling of bodies, he sneers, "My person is my own." To the mariners he insists, "My compass is my own." The word *compass* carries more than the usual nautical significance here. It also refers to what hedges one: the envelope of flesh and consciousness that can never be shared with another.

Auden, then, remains involved with the theme of isolation, whether on a literal island or in the island of self. The further probing of the problem of self—a problem for theologians and psychologists as well as playwrights and poets—will be the business of what follows, where the religious bias of Auden's reading will be analyzed in psychoanalytic terms. As will be seen, the relationship between Prospero the disenchanted artist and Antonio the apologist for solipsism goes beyond the merely fraternal. Auden ultimately reads Antonio and Prospero as a single text.

God or Transcendental Signified?

"Poetry makes nothing happen." How strong the desire to explain away Auden's most famous line. One looks for the kind of irony that qualifies the ostensibly negative remark of Sir Philip Sidney that "the Poet, he nothing affirmes."[44] But Auden means what he says. He does not hint at some special, transcendent quality in poetry. Indeed, in his table talk, the subject of a memoir by Alan Ansen, he made the point even less ambiguously: "I think that poetry is fundamentally frivolity."[45] As Lucy McDiarmid explains, Auden embraces "a poetics of apology and self-deprecation, a radical undermining of poetry itself. Every major poem and every major essay becomes a *retractio,* a statement of art's frivolity, vanity, and guilt."[46] According to Edward Mendelson, Auden often foregrounds technique itself the better "to remove the mystery that surrounds works of art, to explode the myth of poetic inspiration, and to deny any special privileges to poetry in the realm of language or to artists in the realm of ethics."[47]

One can view Auden's position as admirably honest and rigorous—even postmodernistically "true" in its ostensible insistence on a poetics of pure

play. ("All the poems I have written I have written for love."[48]) Yet postmodernism continues to harbor ideological expectations of art, and one suspects that Auden knew his remarks would generate a healthy desire to Find What the Ironist Has Hidden. Does this poet, like Chaucer at the end of his life, asseverate that all art is vanity in the balance against spiritual imperatives? Perhaps. But one should not accede too readily to the common critical assertion that Auden allows a spiritual humility wholly to displace the pride of artistic craft. His depreciations of art, whether in poems, essays, or casual remarks, remain so artful and self-conscious as to offer considerable interpretive latitude to readers put off by a tendentious Christianism.

Yet one can hardly argue that Auden, in developing a religious theme in his symbiont, violates the host text, for Prospero's power and knowledge nudge the drama toward utopian and divine allegory. Though Prospero ends by discarding his mantle, his book, and his staff, he reigns throughout the play as what G. Wilson Knight calls "the 'God' of the *Tempest*-universe"[49]—a deity guaranteeing justice tempered by mercy to those who have sinned against him and hymeneal bliss to the young, virtuous, and innocent. Auden allows this "fantasy of omnipotence," as Coppelia Kahn calls it,[50] to self-destruct, or at least to unravel. He allows it, moreover, to become what Herbert Greenberg sees as "a loose allegory, a reading of *The Tempest* as existential parable."[51] Thus Auden brings forward an understated final theme (not, in fact, difficult to spot in Shakespeare's play): the recognition that art merely approximates the perfect harmony and justice of the divine promise to redeem a fallen, inharmonious, aesthetically and morally retrograde world. Disdainful of sermonizing, Auden prefers the tempered spiritual climax that occurs in Caliban's closing references to "the real Word which is our only *raison d'etre*" and "the perfected Work which is not ours" (p. 340). In these words he makes explicit the message prefigured in the epigraph from Emily Brontë[52] and hinted at in the remarks of the Stage Manager, which reveal the "argument" of the whole. Art, says the Stage Manager, confers certain blessings on us,

> but how
> Shall we satisfy when we meet,
> Between Shall-I and I-Will,
> The lion's mouth whose hunger
> No metaphors can fill? (p. 311).

Though secular readers may demur at the implied pietism, they cannot deny the real fact of spiritual impoverishment in the twentieth century. They

know that terrible maw—recognize the echo, perhaps, from The Book of Common Prayer (Ps. 22: 20: "Save me from the lion's mouth").

One can interpret the lion's mouth as "the anxiety of existence," as Gerald Nelson suggests,[53] or as the image of spiritual ruin, the image of all that consumes the human spirit, including fear of history, fear of despair, and fear of death. In Renaissance Venice the mouth of a bronze lion in the doge's palace was the receptacle for accusations of treason. For Auden, the accusation—the metaphor—is itself the treason. The lion of spiritual desperation, unassuaged, remains hungry, dangerous. Mere metaphor, mere *poetry*, says the author of "The Sea and the Mirror," cannot satisfy the lion, and in his skepticism, Auden anticipates Derrida's critique of philosophical language. Though unaware of grammatology and deconstructive theory, Auden would have been perfectly well aware of how easily his pronouncement could be turned against itself: it is, after all, a denunciation of metaphor couched as a metaphor. But where Derrida would say that there is nothing to put into the lion's mouth *except* metaphor, Auden invites an intimation of the transpoetic, a version of Heidegger's Being, the transcendental signified never accepted by Derrida.

This concept of the beyond- or prior-to-language figures also in Lacan, and Auden's religious meanings prove surprisingly congruent with psychoanalytic theory. After all, Auden's sea and mirror, usually interpreted as symbols of nature and art,[54] are also conventional, and complementary, images of the mind. The poet, as noted previously, thought of the sea as a wilderness necessarily dared in the move beyond the island of social irresponsibility, but the sea also functions as psychological symbol. Although Prospero bravely embarks on this sea, he cannot know its depths. The "seventy thousand fathoms" he invokes are a reminder of the treacherous and unknowable levels in the human psyche. These psychological depths, according to Lacan, bring one ultimately to an image in a mirror: one's "real" self, the primal sundering from which becomes the ground of all lack, all desire. "A mirror has no heart but plenty of ideas," as an Auden epigraph has it.[55] The centrality of the mirror in Auden's poem, then, not to mention its titular emphasis, would seem to invite a Lacanian interpretation of Auden's symbiotic proceedings, in contradistinction to the straightforwardly Freudian reading afforded Stoppard's action in chapter 2.

Students of psychoanalysis, whether Freudian or Lacanian, know that beneath the ego lies the id, something more primitive and instinctive, something that calls into question the ego's fictions of phenomenological or spiritual consequence. The id gives the lie to the Prospero model of self-knowledge and moral distinction, and a number of critics would

agree with Stephen Greenblatt that Prospero's line, "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V.i.275–6), hints at "some deeper recognition of affinity, some half-conscious acknowledgment of guilt."[56] Traditional psychoanalysis accounts neatly, then, for the "phallic" Caliban. This "savage" would-be rapist is, in Shakespeare, the id, and Auden's association of him with Eros or desire need not be construed as violating the Freudian scheme. Prospero, the superego, takes pains to dampen the almost comically prompt ardor of Ferdinand and Miranda. After their betrothal, he tells the prospective bridegroom that he must not "break her virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies may / With full and holy rite be minister'd" (IV.i.15–17). Prospero restrains them from acting on their desire—he restrains them, that is, from acting like Caliban.

But in the Lacanian unconscious, "structured . . . like a language,"[57] "desire" is generated not by instinct but by the ceaseless "sliding of the signified beneath the signifier"[58]—by the frustration of the need to recover the direct relationship with reality (the mother's body, the image in the mirror) that language, the Symbolic Order, forever estranges us from. Lacan calls this desire—along with its manifestation and its object—the Phallus. The Lacanian Phallus, of course, is not the male reproductive organ but that which manifests itself as desire, that which "pokes through" language to hint at a realm from which language itself separates us, that from which we are sundered in the primal castration that comes with the discovery that the self is not in fact the image in the mirror. The Phallus signifies the primal "lack" and the universality of unrealizable desire.

In Lacanian terms, Shakespeare constructs a hierarchy of desire. Caliban's coarse lack is at the bottom. He is at first without language, symbolically an infant in the mirror stage, dwelling in the realm of the Imaginary, in untrammeled possession of the mother and his island world. Presently he must enter the Symbolic Order and encounter the father (Prospero, the Law): "I pitied thee," says Prospero,[59] "Took pains to make thee speak. . . . I endow'd thy purposes / With words" (I.ii.353–8). Thereafter Caliban experiences lack and strives clumsily—by attempting to rape Miranda or otherwise to betray Prospero—to return to the Imaginary. Caliban's clumsy pursuit of the prelinguistic wholeness, moreover, comments reductively on the striving of the other characters: the more sophisticated but still base lack of Antonio and Sebastian, the romantic need of Ferdinand and Miranda, the political yet quasi-spiritual and never-to-be-satisfied desire of the oversubtle Prospero.

But what becomes of this psychology in Auden's poetically critical reading of Shakespeare's play? Auden grappled with his own desire by turning

to a divine Other, the form divine that shaped humanity in its own image. If Auden privileges a Christian absolute in his reading of Shakespeare, one can translate it easily enough into Lacanian terms. Auden's deity, in other words, is a frankly numinous version of the Lacanian Real or transcendental signified—the ineffable something beyond language, beyond art, beyond the self's deceptive imagoes. Thus when Auden subjects *The Tempest* to a kind of Christian deconstruction (oxymoronic as this may sound), its terms prove oddly complementary to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Both systems, after all, give expression to the commonsense perception that no realized desire ever proves definitive or provides final satisfaction.

From the double perspective I am proposing, at once Christian and psychoanalytic, one can begin to see why Auden makes of Antonio, like Caliban, a figure whose psychological importance rivals that of Prospero (in the tripartite structure of the poem, Prospero dominates the first part, Antonio the second, and Caliban the third). Antonio and Caliban become complementary aspects of the central character's lack or desire. But if Caliban is at once the Freudian and the Lacanian Phallus, what is Antonio? Auden presents him, as noted previously, as pure evil, "Creation's O" (p. 325). He attempts to elevate him to the level of Claggart, in *Billy Budd,* or of Shakespeare's own Iago.[60] The problem is that Antonio, a small-bore Machiavel, cannot bear the weight Auden places on him. Auden fails to make him convincing as the representative of what Melville, invoking Plato, calls the "Natural Depravity: a depravity according to nature."[61] One does, however, respond to Auden's conceptualization of Antonio as Prospero's disturbing alter ego, the negative spiritual mirror of his brother's humanism. "As I exist, so you shall be denied" (p. 317). Antonio is the puzzling imago, the brother who is at once one's self and a complete alien. In the central sequence of Auden's poem, the monologue of each Shakespearean character ends with a five-line (six in the case of Miranda) reflection by Antonio. What unites these codas is an emphasis on Antonio's unknowableness. He is an appetite with so many attributes as to become virtually abstract. The fact that he cannot be known, however, suggests his place in a Lacanian analysis. He is the self that cannot speak in the Symbolic Order, recognizable as what Lacan calls variously the Real, the ineffable Other, or the subject in the Realm of Negativity. He is the self that Prospero cannot know directly.

Or in Christian terms, the soul, the "self" there before language. Is the soul, then, evil? As the victim of original sin, yes. Prospero's failure fully to recognize a personal iniquity, which differentiates him from such characters as Sebastian, Gonzalo, and Alonso, is in fact a failure to recognize himself

in the mirror of Antonio. Were Prospero able to assess his own spiritual hubris, he would make possible his own salvation. As it is, he remains the victim of a spiritual usurpation far more grave in its import than the political usurpation he has thwarted—and this is the point of Antonio's smug intransigence. Antonio is the very reification of Prospero's despair, the emblem of a profoundly intimate iniquity of the type John Donne, in his Holy Sonnet 14, prays to the "three-personed God" to be delivered from:

> I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
> Labor to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
> Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
> But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue. . . .[62]

In the psychological convergence of Prospero and Antonio, finally, one sees the source of Prospero's vague discontent, as well as the meaning of the desire to be loved—the "wish for absolute devotion" (p. 314)—that Auden sees in him. One of the lessons of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that the individual is forever crucified between a wish that the real self be loved and the reality that only an image of the self can be loved. As Auden says in "September 1, 1939,"

> For the error bred in the bone
> Of each woman and each man
> Craves what it cannot have,
> Not universal love
> But to be loved alone.[63]

Because Prospero is split from his real, unknowable self, his identity is never more than an image, a fiction. Likewise his desire, for desires and identifications are interconnected and alike illusory. He gets his desires—recovery of his dukedom, a match for his daughter—but is not satisfied, because desires are as fictional as identifications or imagoes.

Auden, then, viewing *The Tempest* as dramatically flawed, at once reads and rewrites it as a profound psychospiritual drama. He extends Shakespeare's action and shifts the focus away from Prospero and his power to his failure to know himself in his brother and to know his own despair. Auden also gauges the spiritual health of the other characters, from the blithe lovers and oblivious mechanics to their more reflective, and troubled, elders. Their continuing psychological and spiritual isolation, partly expressed in the celebrated variety of poetic forms within the sequence, makes problematic their escape from the enchanted island. Finally, Auden boldly elevates Caliban to metapoetic commentator on the commentary. In this

role Caliban renders the poem self-referential and even suggests a certain self-referentiality in the original's juxtaposition of art (Ariel) and nature (himself). He further identifies himself and his mother, the witch Sycorax, as embodiments of libidinal instinct. Antonio, finally, becomes something like original sin itself, rooted in the humanistic—hence blind—heart of his brother.

"The Sea and the Mirror" derogates or at least apologizes for its own art —indeed, argues that even Shakespeare, in the introduction of a too real, too "natural" Caliban, was capable of the "snub to the poetic" (p. 330)— at the same time that, advancing Christian ideas, it faults as morally short-sighted Shakespeare's celebration of Prospero's humanism. But ultimately, like any other act of literary symbiosis, the effect of "The Sea and the Mirror" is more to recover its host than to correct or demolish it. As Jauss says, "a literary past can return only when a new reception draws it back into the present, whether an altered aesthetic attitude willfully reaches back to reappropriate the past, or an unexpected light falls back on forgotten literature from the new moment of literary evolution, allowing something to be found that one previously could not have sought in it."[64]

8 EPISTEMIC DIALOGUE

Defoe, Cozzens, Tournier, Coetzee

Literary historians honor *Robinson Crusoe* as the founding piece of a new genre: the English novel. Though the present study generally holds to the intertextual argument that literary originality is a myth, Defoe's famous story comes close to being sui generis. One can, to be sure, construe it as yet another redaction of *The Tempest:* both stories concern a solitary man on an island, a man who transforms his exile into strange forms of power, a man who, with the assistance of the genius loci, whom he has delivered from barbaric torture, intervenes among the infrequent visitors, good or vicious, to his shore. Eventually, he returns from his island in triumph.[1] But though it reads at times like a *Tempest* for Puritans, Defoe's novel, as Ian Watt has suggested, is really an altogether new myth.[2] As such, it has provided a rich ore-bearing vein for symbiotic miners. As Martin Green has shown, *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired an extraordinary number of retellings and other spinoffs.[3]

Multiple symbiosis, then. "Based on a true story," as Hollywood might say, Defoe's tale of survival and self-reliance on a tropical island in the seventeenth century has always delighted readers. Part of the story's appeal lies in Crusoe himself, a sober, earnest, resourceful, hardworking castaway who not only survives but flourishes with the handful of stores and supplies he salvages from shipwreck. His account of the gradual improvement of his lot—a book-length expansion of the Parable of the Talents—has held readers old and young for nearly three hundred years now and created a whole galaxy of symbionts, including poetry, science fiction, and even—in *The Sexual Life of Robinson Crusoe,* by "Humphrey Richardson"—minimalist pornography. The story has been filmed at least seven times, by

directors that include Georges Méliès (in 1902) and Luis Buñuel (in 1953). It has been what Thomas Pynchon would call Disneyfied, too, as *Lt. Robin Crusoe, U.S.N.*, in which Dick Van Dyke, a downed pilot, takes up with a native maiden he christens "Wednesday." Laurel and Hardy's last film, *Atoll K* (also called *Crusoeland*, 1950) was a takeoff on the familiar tale, and in the rather charming 1964 film *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, the story even went off-planet. The best of these Defoe-inspired movies in recent decades were Caleb Deschanel's *Crusoe* (1988), a particularly handsome version shot in the Seychelles, and the Pierce Brosnan *Robinson Crusoe* (1997) directed by George Miller and Rod Hardy.

The symbiotic novels include three to be considered here: *Castaway,* by James Gould Cozzens; *Friday,* by Michel Tournier; and *Foe,* by J. M. Coetzee (I have chosen the last over Muriel Spark's 1958 novel *Robinson,* which also has a female narrator, because it manages to claim the Crusoe story for postmodernism). The authors of these symbionts find in Defoe's narrative a powerfully suggestive meditation on character, economic theory, political and spiritual destiny, and anthropology. They reexamine the myth to articulate these themes in terms appropriate to their times. Inevitably, too, the repeated symbiotic cloning transforms the Crusoe story into a parable of the creative process. Thus every *Crusoe* symbiont defines itself in terms of how it reorders or revises Defoe's tale. This symbiotic rethinking charts or reflects changes in what Foucault calls the *epistemé*—the climate of perception within a culture at a particular historical moment. Foucault, says Spivak, "diagnoses an age in terms of . . . the self-defined structure of its knowing."[4] In other words, not what we think is so (a *Weltanschauung* or "world picture") but how we know it. Each of the symbiotic texts examined here comments on Defoe's *epistemé* at the same time that it articulates its own. This chapter will eavesdrop, then, on the epistemic dialogue as it unfolds.

"The First Capitalist Hero"

A glance, first, at Defoe's "structure of knowing." More than raw adventure, the story of Defoe's castaway mariner is the stuff of parable and myth. At one level, as Defoe himself pointed out, *Robinson Crusoe* is allegorical autobiography: a decent man, cast away in the year of Defoe's own birth, works diligently through challenges, hardship, and setbacks to make a success of himself against the odds.[5] But at another level Crusoe traces the entire course of human civilization on his island. As Michel Tournier says of his later Crusoe, "Like mankind at the dawn of history, he had passed through the stage of hunting and gathering into that of tilling and stock-

raising."[6] From beginnings in which life threatens to be short as well as solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish, Crusoe proceeds from arboreal sheltering to cave dwelling to fortified stronghold as he gradually develops agriculture, domestication and breeding of animals, the building arts, navigation and seamanship, medicine, cookery, even crude haberdashery. James Joyce once described Crusoe as "an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman."[7] Most important, the castaway becomes morally and ethically more discriminating as he reads his three Bibles, discovers his natural piety, and wrestles with his temptations to murder the cannibals he abhors. Eventually, having telescoped thousands of years of cultural development, he enjoys, at least in imagination, the sweet fruition of an earthly crown, describing himself as "My Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole island."[8] In time he even acquires "subjects" (p. 194).

This progression, as a number of critics have shown, reveals the economic and political norms of Defoe's day. In *Robinson Crusoe* the author naturally defends a political vision that construes the good as whatever serves the interests of a civilization Christian, European, and—as Arnold Kettle emphazizes—bourgeois.[9] Cast away on an expedition for slaves to facilitate colonial exploitation of "the Brasils," Crusoe reproaches himself for many spiritual oversights and omissions, but he fails conspicuously to apologize for being a colonist and slaver. With his slave trading, his estate in Brazil, and, on his island, his "two plantations" (p. 123), Crusoe is the exemplar of seventeenth-century European colonialism. What Crusoe does in Guinea, in the Brasils, and off the coast of the Latin American continent is essentially what others are doing in the Bermudas, in Jamestown, and in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. And that is only *English* colonialism. Criticism of this order comes easily to the twentieth-century sensibility, but one always feels a little foolish reproaching the past for not being as enlightened as the present—especially when the present continues to exhibit its own insidious equivalents to the racism of the past. What interests me about the unapologetic racism and colonialism of *Robinson Crusoe,* at any rate, is the "structure of knowing" it exemplifies.

The moral and psychological philosophy of the age, another tributary to the epistemic river, had in Defoe's lifetime warped from Hobbes to Locke. In fact, notwithstanding Crusoe's Hobbesian early privation, the philosophical model of his condition in what he actually refers to as the "state of nature" (p. 96) derives chiefly from Locke.[10] Crusoe's island is a metaphor for the Lockean tabula rasa, and it is Locke who takes the sunny Enlight-

enment view of human potential that Crusoe embodies and enacts. One sees Locke, too, in Crusoe's religious tolerance. He declares that all three of his subjects, the "Protestant" Friday, Friday's "Pagan" father, and the "Papist" Spaniard, enjoy "liberty of conscience throughout my dominions" (p. 194). Crusoe's latitudinarianism extends even to himself: he has practiced both the Catholic and Protestant faiths.

One also glimpses here Defoe's abhorrence, as a dissenting Whig, of the Test Act. Educated at a nonconformist school, Defoe had intended to become a Presbyterian minister, but business, political, and literary opportunities lured him into different paths. His conception of Crusoe nonetheless reveals an entirely Protestant moral economy of the kind described in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* One sees in Defoe an ingrained, nonconformist conviction that hard work, prosperity, and spiritual election are somehow all interconnected.

Crusoe on his island is an emblem of the universal human predicament. *Pace* Donne, every man *is* an island, and one can, like Harvey Swados, read his story as a parable—two centuries ahead of its time—of "modern" alienation.[11] But among Dissenters solitude was construed as spiritually enabling. Edward Dowden, whose book *Puritan and Anglican* Weber cites, explains the correlation between solitude and piety: "The deepest community [with God] is found not in institutions, or corporations, or Churches, but in the secrets of the solitary heart."[12] Crusoe's solitude, however painful, promotes his spiritual growth. Moreover, Crusoe alone survives the shipwreck—and he has been delivered before. He reproaches himself for failing to recognize how often God has spared the sinner: "Why is it that thou wert not long ago destroy'd? Why wert thou not drown'd in Yarmouth Roads? kill'd in the fight when the ship was taken by the Sallee man of war? devour'd by the wild beasts on the coast of Africa? or drowned HERE, when all the crew perish'd but thy self?" (p. 77). In other words, his experiences are a metaphor for election, and as he comes to see just how much trouble the deity has taken with him, his sense of a special destiny, a special providence, grows from year to year.

Meanwhile, he continues to labor unremittingly—and thus his "capital" grows. Little wonder that Marx, in *Capital,* describes the economic value of labor with reference to Crusoe,[13] and Carlos Fuentes calls the famous castaway "the first capitalist hero."[14] Crusoe prospers, and in the circumstances his prosperity functions as the perfect corollary to his piety. When Weber observes in his chrematistic study that "the great religious epoch of the seventeenth century bequeathed to its utilitarian successor . . . an amazingly good . . . conscience in the acquisition of money,"[15] he implies a certain

ironic contempt for Puritan disingenuousness. But Defoe's genius is to see in Crusoe's experience the possibilities of a dissenting parable that, given the straitness of the circumstances, obviates the spiritually vitiating tendencies of burgeoning wealth (moreover, Crusoe can from time to time note ruefully the uselessness of the money and jewels he has salvaged). *Robinson Crusoe* seems perfectly to square piety and "making it." Crusoe at once finds God and flourishes. His deliverance in this world augurs well for the next.

Defoe, then, is spoken by the cumulative moral, economic, and political myths of his age. His mariner exemplifies the Protestant work ethic, product already of two centuries of development, as well as an emergent Enlightenment ethos centered in ideals of order, reason, and proportion. Defoe himself exemplifies these epistemic givens, and he embraces an empiricism seen in his meticulously "realistic" attention to detail. The "epistemic dialogue" starts, however, as soon as one reflects how oddly a heritage of seventeenth-century Puritanism sorts with eighteenth-century rationalism. "After all," as Angus Ross observes, "Crusoe grew up in the Puritan Commonwealth three quarters of a century before Defoe wrote the book for a more rationalistic age."[16] After reading *Crusoe*'s twentieth-century symbionts, one goes back to Defoe and descries there the uneasy coexistence of Bunyanesque theology and the Enlightenment ideas that thrust it to the wall. One discerns, that is, the eighteenth-century unmooring of seventeenth-century spiritual certainties. In modern times, the doubts proliferate.

Whelmed In Deeper Gulfs: Cozzens's *Castaway*

At first reading, James Gould Cozzens's 1934 novel *Castaway* seems superficially symbiotic. Cozzens transforms Defoe's novel into a contemporary fable in which the basic features of the original have been reversed. Instead of a desert island, the setting is a modern department store of nine floors and a basement. Mr. Lecky, the castaway of the title, roams this building over the course of a week, seeking to provide himself with food, security, and diversion. Why the store remains closed and unvisited (except by a mysterious ringer of an electric bell) is never explained. The whole has the tendentious illogic of dream: Mr. Lecky's exitless and ultimately circular wanderings, in fact, may remind readers of West's *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (published only three years previously), in which the protagonist wanders through the entrails of the Trojan horse.

Cozzens directly acknowledges his debt to Defoe only in the quotation that begins chapter 1 and in one or two of the chapter titles. Several de-

tails, however, make clear the intimate relationship between his novel and Defoe's: Cozzens's hero, Mr. Lecky, discovers like Crusoe "the faint print of a shoeless human foot,"[17] like Crusoe he vomits in a moment of disgust, like Crusoe he fears bears and wolves, and like Crusoe, too, he comes gradually to the assertion of a royal identity, the characterizing of his place of exile as a "domain" (p. 118). Frederick Bracher notes further congruences: Mr. Lecky "builds his first temporary shelter above the ground, like Crusoe sleeping in his tree, having first armed himself for fear of wild creatures. Later he moves to a more permanent refuge—the fort built in a half circle around the lavatory-cave. . . . Like Crusoe, Mr. Lecky never goes abroad without his shotgun (Crusoe's fowling piece), and he wears in his belt the butcher knife which parallels Crusoe's cutlass."[18]

But Cozzens also glances—in his title—at William Cowper, author of "Verses Supposed to be Spoken by Alexander Selkirk" and of "The Castaway," in which the poet compares his certainty of personal damnation to the misery of a drowning sailor:

> No voice divine the storm allay'd,
> No light propitious shone;
> When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
> We perish'd, each alone;
> But I beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.[19]

As will be seen, this spiritual construction on the conceit of being cast away figures prominently in the Cozzens novel and links it to its eighteenth-century host.

In addition to his suggestive title, the author intersperses throughout his narrative a number of quotations—some set out from the text and italicized, others woven casually into it—from a variety of sources. These include, along with the introductory passage from Defoe, a wry snippet from Montaigne; a supplication from the Book of Common Prayer; lines from Psalm 59; excerpts from a manual of surgery and a book on interior design; a couple of lines from Donne's "Elegie XIX, 'Going to Bed' "; and, most tellingly, an oblique quotation from St. Paul. These allusions furnish more than the "jejune irony" of which one critic complains.[20] They expand the author's conversation with the past, for they comment on Mr. Lecky's present from several historical perspectives and with reference to a variety of the arts, sciences, and technologies whereby humanity has distinguished itself. Thus the reader finds Mr. Lecky's misadventures reliefed against such human accomplishments as medicine, poetry, the novel, the familiar essay,

religion, history, and the useful arts. Cozzens provides additional depth by selecting the allusions with an eye to their range across the last five centuries and on back to antiquity. The theme of conversion, repentance, and spiritual renewal figures in several of these—either in the subject matter of the quoted text or in the life of its author. Defoe's words, for example, concern the process of Crusoe's learning to take his religion seriously. The Montaigne excerpt, significantly, comes from the essay "Of Repentance." Two more allusions are prayers, with obvious relevance to this theme of spiritual renewal. Other quotations are from men—Donne, St. Paul—who famously turned from early Laodiceanism to religious commitment.

But the story's armature remains *Robinson Crusoe*. Fearful that someone or something in the store may be stalking him, Mr. Lecky arms himself with a progression of weapons that ironically echoes the telescoping-of-civilization idea: he possesses himself first of a knife, then of an axe, finally of a shotgun.[21] Cozzens makes the satirical point, however, that Mr. Lecky, a product of modern civilization, is ill-equipped to succor himself. Though Crusoe declares, "I had never handled a tool in my life" (p. 85), he teaches himself a homely mastery of such crude implements as he can salvage or manufacture. Mr. Lecky, by contrast, has no such knack. "Like a gun, an axe was an instrument he had never learned to handle" (p. 19), the narrator remarks, and later he describes his protagonist as "a clown in his unwonted role of hunter" (p. 108). Mr. Lecky is fat, maladroit with tools as well as weapons, and lacking in intellectual resources—whether to provide for or to entertain himself.

Cozzens also burlesques the archetypal meeting with Friday. Mr. Lecky encounters only one other human being during his ordeal: an "idiot" whom he irrationally fears and clumsily murders. When he sees him for the first time, the idiot is engaged in "wolfing" sardines from a hastily opened can—precisely as Mr. Lecky had done previously. Oblivious to the implied kinship, Mr. Lecky can only fear and recoil from this bestial, hirsute, speechless, "unshod" (p. 105) nemesis. Stalking this "creature" with his shotgun, Mr. Lecky stalks himself: he fires directly into a mirror (p. 102), and later he shoots away half of its face. Eventually he cuts its throat, but everything about the idiot hints at his symbolic identification as Mr. Lecky's own brutish, inarticulate nature—the id that this bourgeois makes himself sick repressing. Paradoxically, Mr. Lecky becomes what he strives to obliterate. Toward the end he looks into a mirror and sees himself "sinister and unkempt. . . . hardly human, dangerously gross and big," the "eyes empty and senseless" (pp. 165–6).

He seems to be a version of Eliot's "apeneck Sweeney"—the human

being as brute, a graceless amalgam of crude appetites, the product of a materialist civilization. Though the novel appeared in 1934, during the Great Depression, its protagonist struggles in a setting of comprehensive plenty. Here, ironically, he labors with grotesque ineptitude to supply basic needs. Hungry for diversion, he guiltily selects from the store's book section what he takes for a "low" novel, but he cannot manage the requisite attention span for reading. He turns eventually to downing bottles of witch hazel for their alcoholic content. Mr. Lecky is thus an effete Crusoe, a Crusoe manqué, and the author construes his survival not as a triumph but as an ugly comedy.

Engaged in epistemic dialogue, Cozzens neither burlesques nor misreads *Robinson Crusoe*. He rather meditates on the vitiation of the energies and the spiritual resources that delivered Defoe's mariner. Stanley Edgar Hyman makes this point concisely: "Just as the fable of a castaway building an idyllic private empire expresses the burgeoning social optimism of Defoe's class and century, so this latter-day fable of a castaway, brutish and doom-ridden amidst the accumulated treasures of the world, seems to express the hopeless social pessimism of the same class in our day."[22] Cozzens, in other words, has put his finger precisely on the problem with Puritanism in its historical development. The values promoted by the Puritan ethic—sobriety, hard work, frugality—sooner or later lead to the amassing of riches, and riches sort poorly with moral, physical, and spiritual resilience. In its historical filiation, moreover, Puritanism tends to petrify and, in ironic contrast to the impulses of its inception, to manifest itself as intolerance and narrowness (perhaps it is significant that Karl Shapiro, in his 1944 collection of poems, *V-Letter,* juxtaposes "Crusoe" with "The Puritan"). What produces a resourceful, sober, even heroic Crusoe at one season of cultural development seems to produce the anti-Crusoe two hundred years later. One notes the irony with which the narrator reports on a moment when Mr. Lecky briefly delivers himself from his anxiety: "No wagons conquering plain and mountain to jolt at last into an Oregon ever found vaster relief or simpler joy" (p. 23). Mr. Lecky has broken through to the toy department on the eighth floor.

Yet Cozzens's theme is the utterly serious one of spiritual insensibility, which he announces in the quotation from Defoe with which the novel begins:

> *. . . how infinitely good that Providence is, which has provided in its government of mankind such narrow bounds to his sight and knowledge of things; and though he walks in the midst of so many thousand dangers, the sight of*

> *which if discovered to him, would distract his mind and sink his spirits, he is kept serene and calm by having the events of things hid from his eyes . . .*

Inasmuch as Cozzens reverses every point of contact with the host text, one can expect that he invokes this passage ironically. Crusoe's sentiments—he sees the hand of Providence in his quondam ignorance of the cannibals (the fact that they were probably always there does not impair his remembered contentment)—agree with those expressed by Sir Thomas Gray in the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College": "where ignorance is bliss, / 'Tis folly to be wise."[23] But the danger of which Mr. Lecky remains ignorant is hardly something for which to congratulate himself or render thanks. Mr. Lecky stands in peril, quite simply, of damnation.

The repeated ringing that Mr. Lecky will not respond to is evidently a promise of deliverance in its simplest form: if Mr. Lecky would answer the bell, he would be released. "The pale illuminated spark of its breaking circuit high on the pillar" (p. 179) even recalls the divine pillar of fire that, in Exodus, guides the Hebrews in the wilderness. Symbolically, then, the ringing is a spiritual call that the Mr. Leckys of this world are not prepared to answer. They prefer their immurement in a materialist consumer environment that in fact affords them little real sustenance. They are marooned in a culture-wide "desert island."

Another reversal of the Puritan paradigm: Mr. Lecky's solitude does not issue in piety. According to Montaigne in "Of Solitude," "we must reserve a back shop all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principal retreat and solitude,"[24] but Cozzens converts the "back shop" into a vast mercantile venue in which solitude is an affliction:

> Mr. Lecky suffered, with the thought of his end, the stripping of himself to solitude. Here he developed nothing; he only saw what he had. His isolation in skull and breast had advanced with his unfolding in the womb. Before there was a consciousness to be incarcerated, its prison was built. There separate and single-handed consciousness grew up. For cold comfort Mr. Lecky could have the assurance that no man was lonelier or less lonely than himself. (pp. 176–77)

The words in which the author describes Mr. Lecky's loneliness hint not only at the theme of alienation[25] but at a meaning in his name beyond the obvious hints at *lackey* or *licky* or (ironically) *lucky*. *Lecky* is short for *entelechy*, the Aristotelian term Leibnitz proposed as a synonym for *monad*. Leibnitz's monads or entelechies are "windowless" entities or "souls" that exist in total isolation. Though they cannot know or interact with each other,

they are divinely synchronized to function, as Bertrand Russell explains, in "pre-established harmony." According to Russell, Leibnitz updated a conceit of the Cartesians, who resolved an apparent contradiction of the principle that mind and body are mutually independent by the argument that they are divinely synchronized, like two clocks that keep identical time without affecting or interacting with each other.[26]

This Cartesian idea of synchronized clocks would seem to have something to do with Mr. Lecky's watch, which remains stopped at a quarter past five through most of the story (it starts again at the end). The modern, post-Cartesian world sees mind and body as a single, complex continuum: there is only the one clock or watch. This timepiece, however, still requires synchronization with something outside itself. Only at the moment of his annihilating epiphany is Mr. Lecky able to see—too late—that the watch that is himself was keeping *spiritual* time all along.

Mr. Lecky's watch also recalls the timepiece Quentin Compson has inherited from his grandfather in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* published scant months before Cozzens began work on *Castaway.*[27] Quentin's father tells him that "only when the clock stops does time come to life"—a remark that seems also to describe Mr. Lecky's painful immersion in time. Ultimately, says Mr. Compson, a watch affords only knowledge of the time at a given moment, knowledge of a present construed as "the reducto absurdum of all human experience."[28] But the "absurd" that Mr. Lecky needs to discover is not the universal meaninglessness beneath the Faulknerian sound and fury: it is the absurd as divine mystery, the absurd of Tertullian and Kierkegaard.

Mr. Lecky also exemplifies the original Aristotelian concept of entelechy as the soul in its becoming, its realized potential. A contemporary of Defoe's, cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* observes that "the Soul is the first Entelechy of a natural organical body, having life potentially." The human being's entelechy is a process of becoming what the human being is in potentiality—either lapsing into inert matter or emerging into eternal life. Cozzens's character, wandering through a vast edifice that Matthew J. Bruccoli identifies as "symbolically his body,"[29] illustrates this entelechy negatively: the reader comes to see him as a mind-body unredeemed by spirit, a chrysalis that never hatches. Mr. Lecky "realizes" as mere flesh, doomed to corruption. Thus he broods on mortality:

> Mr. Lecky . . . was disgusted to think of his good flesh so reduced. The certainty of its end made it prematurely loathesome. It was foul stuff—wretched man, to be so amply provided with it! It was the means of

> his horrid predestination. It consigned Mr. Lecky to the extinction he abhorred; it marked him, still living, for putrefaction. Who should deliver him from the body of this death? (p. 176)

The narrator's allusion to St. Paul (Rom. 7:24) throws the whole narrative into a new focus, and presently, the bell ringing like the last trump, the dead idiot struggles up from his bloody basement in a resurrection that proves abortive when the spiritually deaf Mr. Lecky returns, looks into the "familiar strangeness" (p. 180) of his face, and knows at last himself and his fate—to be a castaway in eternity.

For as the nine floors and the nine chapters have hinted, *Castaway* is also the story of a gestation, the spiritual gestation that every soul undergoes in its corporeal life. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), runs the scriptural exhortation. Failure to be born again ensures eternal death, and in Mr. Lecky Cozzens suggests that this absolute mortality is the fate of secular, urban, materialist humanity. In the end the author shares with Defoe a religious outlook—but Mr. Lecky's *epistemé* or "structure of knowing," so regressive as to preclude insight into his spiritual and ontological plight, differs radically from that of the first Crusoe. In its relationship with *Robinson Crusoe,* then, *Castaway* brilliantly dramatizes epistemic contrast, for Cozzens's subject is nothing less than the exhaustion of the cultural energies exemplified in his host text. Nevertheless, to the extent that *Castaway* retains a thematic orientation to the Western, Christian heritage, it occupies an intellectual middle ground between Defoe's novel and the structuralist and poststructuralist *Crusoe*s to come.

Heureux Tropiques: Tournier's Crusoe

It remains for a later author to see fully the ethnological possibilities in the encounter between Crusoe and the colonial Other, between Western civilization and the primitive world. *Friday, or the Other Island,* originally published in 1967 as *Vendredi, ou les limbes du Pacifique,* was Michel Tournier's first novel, and it gained its author considerable attention, coming as it did at the height of 1960s challenges to the old ways of thinking, the old *epistemé.* D. G. Bevan points out that Tournier's novel broadly exemplifies this period and its struggle to repudiate the Western past. "Tournier brings up to date the original myth of Defoe in a novel born in and for the sixties, saturated with a painful awareness of solitude and the Other, imbued with a terrible thirst for the absolute. *Friday* constitutes a daring transposition, where the Juan Fernandez archipelago, henceforth twinned with San Fran-

cisco, has become the romantic crucible for an exuberant counterculture, the imaginary cradle of a highly meaningful Flower Power."[30]

In *Friday* Tournier reintroduces the familiar York mariner and—with extensive modifications—retells his extraordinary experiences. Tournier starts his story on the eve of the fatal shipwreck. In a gesture that recalls *The Waste Land* and anticipates by two years Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies,* the captain reads the Tarot of his passenger, who, four or five years younger than the first Crusoe, is more callow than his counterpart in Defoe —twenty-two as opposed to twenty-six or seven. The story that follows proves perfectly congruent with the prefatory casting of the Tarot. Other modifications derive from the Alexander Selkirk narratives (by Woodes Rogers in 1712 and subsequently by Richard Steele in 1713). Tournier's Crusoe washes up on an island in the Pacific, as did Selkirk, rather than on an imaginary island on the Atlantic side of the Latin American continent, some leagues away from the mouth of the Orinoco River, as does Defoe's character. Tournier's Crusoe, however, unlike Selkirk, does not shipwreck in the Juan Fernandez group, but on an unknown island midway between that archipelago and the Chilean coast. Tournier also transfers to Friday some of Selkirk's experiences, notably the chasing of goats and the goat that breaks a near-fatal fall from a cliff. Most important, though Crusoe remains the protagonist, he eventually exchanges roles with Friday. Tutor becomes tutee. Like Defoe, finally, Tournier produces a thoughtful, morally earnest hero, but where the original Crusoe gives expression to the definitive energies and philosophical perceptions of his age, Tournier's becomes a kind of eighteenth-century counterculture subversive, recognizing and resisting the Faustian sickness at the heart of Western civilization and struggling to recover some elemental or primal sympathy with earth, sky, and sun.

Tournier's Crusoe, like Mr. Lecky and their mutual ancestor, eventually embraces a royal pretension. Like the first Robinson Crusoe, too, he sees himself as governor of his island realm. Indeed, he attempts to be every functionary of colonial power—"governor, military commander and administrator" (p. 91)—and mounts a monstrous Conradian charade of keeping up the white man's order and punctilious behavior in the wilderness as he works "to develop the resources of the island" (p. 58) and to "pursue the work of civilization—tillage, stockbreeding, building, administering, lawgiving" (p. 105). But he comes at last quietly to abandon such posturing.

Tournier also, like Cozzens, alters Defoe's ending. Instead of returning to European or Latin American civilization, Tournier's Crusoe opts to remain on his island, where he has undergone the familiar telescoping of the

human experience vis-à-vis nature and primitive humanity. This Crusoe has recovered paradise, and he scarcely hesitates to decline the deliverance available through the *Heron*. In the original French text, this vessel bears the name *Whitebird*—a reminder, perhaps, that racism can taint even the culture's image for the Paraclete. Friday, who mistakes the ship for an airy spirit, sails away with the deliverers, among whom he will surely come to grief. But Crusoe will not be alone again, for the cook's boy jumps ship. Crusoe renames the boy Thursday (evidently because French schoolchildren have Thursdays off—the name becomes Sunday in the English text).[31]

By the same token, ostensible congruences between the two novels prove deceptive. Tournier's Crusoe, like Defoe's, encounters Englishmen only after "twenty-eight years, two months, and some twenty days" (p. 215) of insular exile. Tournier also observes dates of day and month that for the most part coincide with those in *Robinson Crusoe:* 30 September and 19 December figure in both stories as the dates of shipwreck and deliverance. But here the similarities end, for Tournier sets *Friday* exactly a century later than *Robinson Crusoe,* so that the tale becomes a parable of the Enlightenment, including its tendentious rationalism as well as its celebration—by a Rousseau going much further than Locke—of humanity in its natural state. Lytton Strachey, in his *Landmarks in French Literature,* remarks in Rousseau a Crusoesque ability to flourish in solitude: "Rousseau, one feels, was the only man of his age who ever wanted to be alone."[32] Ian Watt points out that Rousseau was in fact an admirer of *Robinson Crusoe,* which was to be the cornerstone of Emile's education;[33] and Anthony Purdy notes that "Tournier follows Rousseau's advice, giving us a novel which begins with the shipwreck and ends with the arrival of the rescue ship."[34] Tournier's initially priggish and subsequently reflective and philosophical Crusoe owes much to Rousseau, whose thesis regarding the noxious effects of civilization on natural humanity he arrives at independently on the island he repeatedly characterizes—this is the meaning of the book's original French subtitle—as a "limbo," a place whose exemption from time, human consciousness, and civilized order he first violates, then embraces. Crusoe comes to recognize in this "Limbo of the Pacific," this "place hung between Heaven and Hell" (p. 117), the numinous "other island" (pp. 85, 113, 125, 137, 164, 195) invoked in the subtitle appended to the novel in its English translation. Here he finds himself—and God.

But Crusoe embraces noble savagery only after he has struggled between the two moral poles—ostensibly either/or in their mutual exclusivity—of complete dereliction and maniacal regimentation. Quaker and "devout

Puritan" (p. 200), he contrives abundant methods of disciplining himself and foregoing pleasure, for "work . . . is our greatest wealth" (p. 138). Early in his exile he has seasons of despair in which he lapses into swinish torpidity, literally wallowing naked in the mire for days on end. Subsequently he embraces what he takes to be his responsibility to bring order to the island's chaos. The distinction is focused in his ambivalence toward time and timekeeping. At first he keeps no record, but then he sets up a calendar mast in which he notches the passing days. When he makes a crude water clock he is well on his way to civilizing—and corrupting—his island. "I demand, I insist," he writes in his journal, "that everything around me shall henceforth be measured, tested, certified, mathematical and rational" (p. 61). Perfect child of the century of Linnaeus, he falls to mapping, naming, and systematizing. He founds his own *Conservatory of Weights and Measures* (p. 63), as much a shrine as a scientific or technological convenience.

Thus far does Tournier restage the original Crusoe's feat of building in and ordering his wilderness. The first Crusoe observes "that as reason is the substance and original of the mathematicks, so by stating and squaring every thing by reason, and by making the most rational judgment of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanick art" (p. 85). By the same token he can embrace a schedule—"This morning I began to order my times of work" (p. 88)—that would have made Ben Franklin or Jay Gatsby proud. Tournier takes the hint: his Crusoe has grown up with *Poor Richard's Almanac*. But Tournier renders all of this systematizing, scheduling, regimentation, and order parodic. This eighteenth-century Crusoe—and the civilization he stands for—is a study in anal-retentive fixation: "First his toilet, then the reading of a passage of the Bible at the lectern, then the saluting of the colours and the formal opening of the citadel," then a day's work that might include breeding "the nanny-goats numbered B13, L24, G2 and Z17" before donning "his general's uniform, because that afternoon he had to perform a series of official functions: he had to announce the result of the census of sea-turtles, take the chair at the Drafting Committee of the Charter and Penal Code, and finally preside at the opening of a new bridge of lianas . . . across a ravine" (pp. 83, 84).

Yet from time to time Tournier's Crusoe lets the water clock run down or simply stops it so that he can escape for a while from time. These periods of personal indulgence are sins only from the perspective of the mad system he has imposed. From another perspective—and this is a book about decentering the subject and discovering other perspectives—they are the moments when he can glimpse the mystical "other island" and begin clum-

sily to advance his spiritual health, his "transformation" (p. 86) or "metamorphosis" (pp. 104, 199) or "evolution" into the "new man" (p. 74). He begins to see the absurdity of his attempts at order, "to feel more and more often that the cultivation of the island was a meaningless enterprise. It was at these moments that a new man seemed to be coming to life within him, wholly alien to the practical administrator" (pp. 112–13).

When in due course Friday arrives, he contributes signally to this metamorphosis; he is one of the most important catalysts for the reaction in Crusoe's heart. True to the archetype, Crusoe tries at first to make Friday a good nigger and, incidentally, a good Christian. But this "Ariel-soul," as Tournier calls him (p. 146), this "spirit of the air" (p. 199), does not make things easy for his Prospero. As much subversive Caliban as complaisant Ariel, Friday cannot be made to fit into Crusoe's Western, logocentric vision, however much both he and his master strive. As a French critic explains, "*Vendredi n'est pas* colonisable."[35] Accidentally, Friday sets off forty barrels of gunpowder in an explosion that destroys much of Crusoe's artificial order: his calendar mast, his water clock, the Residence, the Meeting House, and that fount of logocentrism, the Bible. Freed at last from these emblems of a Puritan, tyrannical, Eurocentric order, Crusoe begins to learn from Friday's example the mystical principles of a kind of Zoroastrian sun worship. They become the "two children," the Twins in Crusoe's Tarot, that "hold hands in front of a wall symbolizing the City of the Sun" (p. 10).[36] As sun children, "clothed with childlike innocence," they exist in a paradisal state outside of time—at least until the coming of the *Heron* and the desertion of Friday.

At pains to discount the appearance of homoerotic fantasy, Tournier charts Crusoe's progress through stages of heteroclite heterosexuality. First the castaway construes his island, which he names Speranza, as female, then it becomes successively mother and spouse to him (he finds a vaginal cave with a uterine inner recess to which he retreats for lengthy periods; subsequently he begins, in a "pink combe," actually to copulate with the island: mandrakes spring up from this union). But eventually he attains to a kind of perpetual exhilaration characterized as "solar sexuality, which is not merely androgynous but *circular*" (p. 10). Tournier evidently has in mind a kind of spiritual self-fertilization.

This solar enlightenment appears to be founded on a repudiation of subjectivity—the need to perceive all things as somehow related or convenient or answerable to the self. Crusoe begins to glimpse this idea early on, and in his journal he strives to define the relationship between subject and ob-

ject. He realizes that "the subject is the disqualified object" (p. 90), that his subjective mind tends to deny external things—sights, smells, sounds—their separate existence:

> In that innocent, primary—as it were, primeval—stage which is our normal mode of existence there is a happy solitude of the known, a virginity of things comprising all things in themselves like so many functions of their own essence—colour, smell, taste, and form. In this sense Robinson *is* Speranza. He is conscious of himself only in the stir of myrtle leaves with the sun's rays breaking through, he knows himself only in the white crest of a wave running up the yellow sand.
>
> Then suddenly there is a click. The subject breaks away from the object, divesting it of a part of its colour and substance. There is a rift in the scheme of things, and a whole range of objects crumbles in becoming *me,* each object transferring its quality to an appropriate subject. The light becomes the eye and as such no longer exists: it is simply the stimulation of the retina. The smell becomes the nostril—and the world declares itself odourless. The song of the wind in the trees is disavowed: it was nothing but a quivering of the tympani. Until finally the whole world has been absorbed into my soul which is the soul of Speranza, plucked out of the island, which then dies beneath my sceptical gaze.
>
> An upheaval has taken place. Object has been roughly degraded to subject. (pp. 88–89)

The movement in this passage from third person ("Robinson *is* Speranza") to first ("my soul," "my . . . gaze") enacts the phenomenon observed. The language—"innocent," "virginity," "rift," "crumbles," "degraded"—implies that the endless subversion of object by subject involves the loss of a worthwhile separateness, a valuable integrity. At the same time, the word *skeptical,* which reveals the Frenchman beneath the Briton, the Cartesian beneath the Quaker, intimates the epistemological precariousness and unreliability of uncritical subjectivity. Struggling toward intersubjectivity, Crusoe echoes Montaigne's "*Que sais-je?*"

Presently Crusoe learns to apply this skepticism to his assumptions about other human beings, notably Friday, and the reader gradually realizes that Tournier is reshaping the Crusoe myth according to the tenets of Lévi-Strauss's new anthropology, in which value judgments about so-called "primitive" cultures are scrupulously avoided. It was Lévi-Strauss, with whom Tournier had studied at the Musée de l'Homme, who brought the decentering of the subject to anthropology, and it is Lévi-Strauss whose

memoir, *Tristes Tropiques,* contains a chapter entitled "Robinson Crusoe," in which the author recalls his frustration at being unable to remain with and study a hitherto unknown tribe of Indians he had encountered in the Amazon (in his cultural isolation, Lévi-Strauss saw himself as a Crusoe). Tournier's Crusoe, who at first thinks that without his controlling mind the natural world must remain "chaos," sets out to civilize his island and its only nonwhite resident. But fortunately—and largely through Friday's natural integrity (he comes of a tribe that would remain unsubjugated by whites until 1882)—Crusoe learns to let the world and other people be themselves. When he encounters Europeans again for the first time in more than twenty-eight years, he recognizes in each of them "a *possible* world, having its own coherence, its values, its sources of attraction and repulsion, its centre of gravity." He recognizes, too, that problems arise because "each of these possible worlds naively proclaimed itself the reality. That was what other people were: the obstinate passing for the real" (p. 209). Crusoe exits from this subjective, ethnocentric, Faustian order. He enters "solar" eternity.

Unlike Mr. Lecky, that is, he is "born again." Hence a last modification of the Defoe story, one concerning the shared dates mentioned above. The first Crusoe, who is struck by a number of calendar concurrences (pp. 108–9), is cast away on his birthday, 30 September, and delivered on 19 December. These dates also figure in Tournier—except that his Crusoe's birthday falls not on 30 September but on 19 December—the day he repudiates the European order for good. Thus *Friday,* in its anthropologically informed view to an "aquarian" future, invites its readers to recognize in its great predecessor, *Robinson Crusoe,* a document mired in cultural retrospection. Where Defoe's Crusoe seeks to recreate the old order on his island, Tournier's, embracing a yet older, primitive order, paradoxically embraces a dispensation altogether new. One looks back, the other forward. As Tournier explains in *Le Vent paraclet,* "my novel aims at being inventive and forward-looking; whereas that of Defoe, entirely backward-looking, limits itself to describing the reestablishment of the lost civilization with the means at hand."[37]

A Poststructuralist Crusoe: Coetzee's *Foe*

Where Tournier faces up to the reader's interest in Crusoe's sexuality, imagining Crusoe copulating with a tree fork or "pink combe" before experiencing the orgasmic though nonpenetrative joys of a mystical sexuality imagined as solar and "circular," J. M. Coetzee, in his novel *Foe,* actually

introduces a woman into the story, a second castaway named Susan Barton, whom Coetzee imagines as the original recorder of the tale. Barton joins "Cruso" and Friday at the end of their stint on the island and, when the Englishman dies on the voyage home, takes responsibility for telling their story. She also takes responsibility for Friday—and for the increasingly profound mystery of Friday. The novel, almost entirely in her voice, consists for the most part of letters she writes to the author Daniel Foe (as the historical Defoe sometimes signed himself). Like Charles Kinbote (Coetzee once wrote an article on *Pale Fire*),[38] Barton offers the raw material for art to transform—but of course the end product, as readers of *Robinson Crusoe* know, bears as little resemblance to its alleged source material as John Shade's poem, "Pale Fire," bears to the bizarre anecdotes of Zemblan court life with which his daft neighbor regales him.

Barton, however, is no lunatic, and her narrative, though finally remote from Defoe's, is at least conceivable as the kind of ore that, in the refiner's fire, could issue in the familiar Crusoe story. *Foe* is, in addition to what Robert M. Post calls "an allegory of contemporary South Africa,"[39] an allegory of the creative process, and Barton is an especially resolute and resourceful muse. Nina Auerbach rightly calls her story "a brilliant disquisition on the making of fictions."[40] But it also concerns the relationship between fictions and whatever it is they cloak or construe. Although readers encounter hints about the gracelessness of "real life" and the necessity that it be transformed by art (Cruso proves a rather oafish and unimaginative individual, and his stay on the perfectly dreary island is quite colorless), they never really learn precisely why the Defoe novel differs so radically from the Barton narrative. This "mystery"—a favorite word of Barton's—signals the epistemological point, for Coetzee, a University of Cape Town professor of "General Literature," which presumably involves a good deal of recent French writing, occupies himself here with showing that "reality" is an unknown country, unreachable by language, inaccessible to any system of knowing. At the same time, whatever the inscrutability of the real, and however fictive its treatment in works of the imagination, art contrives, by dint of certain self-referential strategies, to afford glimpses and intimations of the mysterious realm beyond the veil of language.

Coetzee's Cruso on his island is humanity without any of the fine arts—with few, even, of the useful arts. This anti-Crusoe lives a life of besotted complacency in a place without beauty, a place of endlessly alternating wind and rain, a place where "noisome" masses of seaweed litter the beaches, breeding grounds for sand fleas and other insects. He eats only bitter lettuce, fish, and birds' eggs. He salvages no supplies from wrecks. He do-

mesticates no animals and so wears not goatskin clothes but the skins of apes. Indeed, he seems little removed from the lower primates. He keeps no journal, no record of the passing time. He fires no pots, he builds no boats. His teeth have rotted. He is unimaginative, unfriendly, and generally benighted. He does not welcome Susan Barton, he does not wish to leave. Indeed, he differs at virtually every point from the Crusoe Defoe would present to the world, the person Walter Allen characterizes as "a truly heroic figure, a man dominating nature."[41]

Back to the Hobbesian view, then? No, rather the Camusian, for Cruso is also Sisyphus, that figure of the existential absurd. He labors endlessly, like Sisyphus with his rock, to prepare a vast system of agricultural terraces, even though he has no seed to plant in them. But Coetzee does not urge Camus's Promethean revolt against the human lot. Far more disinterested, he merely shows the poverty of human life without fictions to transform it. "Who would wish to read," Barton wonders, "that there were once two dull fellows on a rock in the sea who filled their time by digging up stones?"[42]

When Foe asks "how it was that Cruso did not save a single musket from the wreck" (p. 53) or perhaps "a carpenter's chest" (p. 55), the reader sees the powerful need to improve on the story's existential givens—just as I am compelled to "interpret" Cruso's meaningless work with the terraces as a version of the myth of Sisyphus. Presently, at a desk with quill in hand herself, Barton wonders "how long before I am driven to invent new and stranger circumstances: the salvage of tools and muskets from Cruso's ship; the building of a boat, or at least a skiff, and a venture to sail to the mainland; a landing by cannibals on the island, followed by a skirmish and many bloody deaths." When she asks, "will the day ever arrive when we can make a story without strange circumstances?" (p. 67), a double irony includes her unawares. To the extent that *Foe,* the novel in hand, dispenses with the "strange circumstances," the desiderated day *has* arrived, but the elaborate reflexivity of this latest *Crusoe* symbiont may constitute the strangest circumstance of all.

When, moreover, Barton imagines Foe deciding "Better without the woman" (p. 72), the reader sees the story that will be, not "the truth," but "the substance of the truth," from which the first teller—"a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso"—will be altogether elided. The reader, however, is not encouraged to view as some kind of feminist indictment the disparity between Defoe's familiar novel and Barton's narrative. The point is rather that the myth, however one construes it (survival, return to Eden, material success, spiritual election), was always already there, speaking its speaker. "In writing," says Foucault, "the point is

. . . a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears."[43] Barton, then, enacts "the fate of all storytellers" (p. 51), the death of the author.

As the Crusoe story tends to telescope human development, so does this novel compress the filiation of structuralist and poststructuralist thought. In the first place, it demonstrates the simultaneous violability and inviolability of myth: the Crusoe myth is not monolithic, it naturally warps and varies from telling to telling—even in the mouth of Coetzee's imagined Ur-Crusoe. "I would gladly now recount to you the history of this singular Cruso, as I heard it from his own lips," Barton writes to Foe. "But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy" (pp. 12–13). She then mentions details from a hodgepodge of stories that seem to glance at Tournier, Buñuel, and Muriel Spark, as well as the familiar Defoe narrative. As Lévi-Strauss says, "a myth refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future." Lévi-Strauss dismisses as pointless "the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions. . . . There is no single 'true' version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth."[44]

But as the poststructuralists have demonstrated, the binary oppositions or "structures" that make myth intelligible in Lévi-Strauss's economy do not signify or represent underlying truth or reality—they represent only themselves and the infinite reticulation of signifying. Lacan speaks of this circularity when he characterizes signifying chains as "rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings."[45] The Real, like the self, remains a mystery, a "silence" inaccessible to systems of signification, the Symbolic Order. Thus Coetzee reweaves the Crusoe myth in intriguing ways yet insists on the residuum of mystery in the story. More than residuum, actually. For the more his narrator strives for the truth, the more she finds herself unable to grasp it. Among the "mysteries": the terraces, "how the apes crossed the sea," why Friday accepted his slavery to Crusoe, and—most important of all—"how Friday lost his tongue" (p. 67). At one point she stops to list the mysteries she cannot solve, and the discussion goes on for five pages.

Barton's difficulties adumbrate those of the reader, who must struggle with not only Barton's mysteries but also those attending on Coetzee's

technique. Presently comfortable with the point about fiction's arranging of life's colorless or disorderly raw material, the reader finds that there remains a profoundly meaningful obscurity about this novel. Whose voice, for example, intrudes in the closing pages? According to Dick Penner, "The narrator is no longer Susan Barton, but an interloper who drifts among the shades that were the characters, perhaps the consciousness that breathed life into them to begin with."[46] This "consciousness"—the author himself—describes the most bizarre oppositions of all: complementary fantasy tableaux encountered, apparently in the present, in Foe's house (first at night, then in the daytime) and in the wreck of the ship that brought Susan Barton to Cruso's island. In Foe's house the authorial presence discovers the mummies of Susan Barton, Foe, and Friday, who seems still to be alive. "From his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island" (p. 154). Now the entry into the house is repeated, and a manuscript letter is found: it bears the opening line of the novel. Another repetition. And now the author-narrator himself repeats this formulaic opening: "With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slip overboard" (p. 155). It is worth noting that Barton herself had repeated this phrase, with minor variations, early in her account. Coetzee's point is the Lacanian one of endless repetition in the Symbolic Order. However often we hear a story, however it is superficially varied, we shall still be within the order circumscribed by language, by our systems of knowing. Slipping into the water, the author imagines not swimming to the island but being dragged down to the wreck of Barton's ship—and there he finds yet another version of the story: the bloated bodies of Barton and her Portuguese captain, three hundred years drowned. The author insists on these final, puzzling tableaux to show again and more emphatically that his story merely functions within the symbolic order of the Crusoe myth and so refers only to itself. At the same time, it contains gaps and oppositions that desire will not close. It can hint at the real by strategies of semiotic frustration, but it can represent only representation, never the "real." "Coetzee thus elegantly suggests," says Kathryn M. Wagner, "the necessity of reconciling ourselves to a world of indeterminacy, in which we should not enquire too closely into what it is that keeps us metaphorically afloat in a sea of plural significations."[47]

In the wreck the author again finds Friday, a "chain about his throat," and asks, "what is this ship?" But the water defeats the words: "this is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (p. 157). In other words, like the poet Adrienne Rich, Coetzee imagines what Susan Barton at one point characterizes as a "dive into the wreck" (p. 142). In Rich, the wreck is at once a personal unconscious and Western, logocentric

culture. The speaker of Rich's poem, "having read the books of myths," dives "to see the damage that was done / and the treasures that prevail."[48] But Coetzee seems to construe the wreck in more Lacanian terms: it is the locus of the Lacanian Real, a place altogether excentric to and beyond the resources of language. "This is not a place of words" (p. 157). Here, again, something that is not speech issues from Friday's mouth.

The heart of the mystery is Friday's absent tongue and the question of whether, speechless, he is nevertheless capable of the writing that Foe urges Barton to teach him. Barton had, at Cruso's bidding, looked into Friday's mouth, and she remains haunted and disgusted by his "mutilation." She recurs often to the mystery of his loss and the significance of silence in a world of speech. This silence, however, is not exclusive to Friday. "In every story there is a silence" (p. 141), she remarks, and this is the silence that signals all that is not in the story, all that language cannot represent. As will be seen, this silence resembles what Freud, in his analysis of the Irma dream, calls the "one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown."[49] Speech, too, contains its mystery. Barton realizes that in moments of inattention we exist in "cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in our lives" (p. 30). This other voice, intuited only to escape us, is at once the Lacanian self, inaccessible in the symbolic order, and—on the novel's metafictional plane—the voice of an "author" (whether Coetzee or the myth itself) not altogether unknown to his characters, the occasion for Barton's anguished question: "Who is speaking me?" (p. 133).

The attempts at teaching Friday to write remain inconclusive with regard to his actual mental abilities. Coetzee would spoil his parable, of course, if his character mastered alphabetic communication and then wrote down what happened to his tongue. What the speculation about writing does is remind the reader of the poststructuralist view that speech is subsumed under the broader category of writing, of *écriture,* defined as all whereby we express *différance,* all that contains what Derrida calls the trace. Writing is what contains alterity—and inasmuch as Friday is wholly Other, he may be said always already to have occupied a space of writing.

Barton's account of Friday's empty mouth and of her peering into it have their intertexts, as suggested above, in Freud's Irma dream and in Erikson's and Lacan's rereadings of that seminal episode in the history of psychoanalysis. For Freud, this dream was involved with professional anxieties—which is to say with the fate of his new science of the mind. It was also a breakthrough in that it enabled him to discover the principle of dreams as wish fulfillments. In other words, it embodies an intriguing opposition

between one of the founding insights of psychoanalysis and the dread that the discoverer of psychoanalysis would fail—would be only the *Spritze* that figures in the dream. Erikson points out that *Spritze,* the word for syringe, literally means "squirter"—a term colloquially suggestive of penile inadequacy. Erikson also suggests that the examined mouth is a symbol of the "procreative inside"—not only Irma's but Freud's. In it the dreaming therapist sees his own unconscious, his own alarmingly "feminine" creativity.[50] By this reasoning, Barton, looking into Friday's mouth, looks to *her* procreative inside, the travail with literary creation documented by Coetzee's novel in its entirety.

But the reading of the Irma dream that best enables the reader to understand Barton's obsession with Friday's tongueless mouth is that of Lacan in his *Seminar, Book II.* Lacan shows the error of construing the insights of psychoanalysis—first predicated on this dream of looking into someone's mouth, looking into the very fount of language—as epistemologically absolute. In showing that the unconscious Freud charted is itself structured like a language, hence unable to refer beyond itself, he explodes the Freudian pretense of reaching some kind of psychological bedrock. Looking into this mouth, one sees, as Eve Bannet explains, "a revelation of ultimate Reality, of that reality which is unnamable and unmentionable, before which all words cease and all categories fail."[51] Yet this inaccessible reality is also the sphere of the self or subject, speechless in the Symbolic Order. The word that swims into Freud's dreaming consciousness—*trimethylamin*—is so detached from whatever coherence the dream has, says Lacan, that it must be understood not as *a* word but as *the* word, at once the exemplification of all signifying and the paradoxical emblem of what cannot be signified: the subject. For Lacan, Freud's dream concerns a "quest for the word" that is "the quest for signification as such."[52]

Small wonder that Susan Barton cannot finally resolve the mystery of Friday's Irma-like mouth. But she recognizes that this mystery is of enormous significance, and her cataloguing of logical impasses is the precondition for hearing the voice that cannot speak in the Symbolic Order, the subject that gives the lie to the ego's masks. "If the story seems stupid," she remarks to Foe, "that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue. . . . The story of Friday's tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday's tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday" (pp. 117–18).

Here the reader encounters Coetzee's departure from Lacan, whose sys-

tem, as Bannet points out, makes no provision for the possibility that art might contrive strategies for allowing the subject to speak. "Lacan's emphasis on the dominance of the symbolic order and on the inevitability of repetition precludes him from really understanding creativity."[53] But in perennially questioning itself, Coetzee seems to say, art naturally explores the central silence and creates gaps in which the voice of the subject can be heard. The difficulties and conundrums of his novel, then, exist to expose the reflexivity of the Symbolic Order and to effect what Lacan calls the "quest for signification as such."

In the search for signification and the problematics of creativity we have come a long way from Defoe's realism. The element of dialogue with the host text, *Robinson Crusoe,* has become rather attenuated as the *epistemé* comes to offer fewer and fewer connections with the age that produced a Thomas Sprat and his celebrated (and satirized) call for a scientifically utilitarian language, a language eschewing rhetorical ornament and abstraction in favor of simplicity and concreteness. Nevertheless, a dialogue of some kind persists—a discussion of the birth and rebirth that figures in all four of the texts examined here. Defoe's protagonist is "born" in being cast away; his exile becomes a metaphor for corporeal life, in which, by working and meditating in the solitude of his heart, he distinguishes himself spiritually, comes to recognize what in strict Calvinist theology would be called election. Tournier, by contrast, associates birth with the decision not to reembrace civilization. His Crusoe puts the finishing touches on his rebirth as the new man when he declines to return to England. If rebirth is more problematic in the other two symbionts, only in Cozzens's bleak allegory does the fetus prove altogether stillborn. Mr. Lecky enacts the story—framed by enneads (floors, chapters)—of an aborted soul birth. The problematic birth in the Coetzee symbiont, lastly, is that of art itself, which paradoxically requires the elision or effacement of the muse, a "death of the author," who at one point even recognizes herself in a stillborn child. Yet as maieutic muse, she effects the birth of *Robinson Crusoe,* a work of art. We have come round again to the theme of *The Tempest.*

9 ANCIENTS AND MODERNS AND POSTMODERNS

Beowulf and *Grendel*

Rewriting *Beowulf* as *Grendel*, John Gardner marshals a little more reverence than Tom Stoppard brings to the transformation of *Hamlet* into *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. These four texts are, however, interestingly related. As Stoppard's play includes a character—the Player—who invites recognition as Shakespeare himself, so in Gardner's novel does the *Beowulf* poet play a central role. One notes, too, the genealogical relationship between an important figure in *Beowulf* and the title character in *Hamlet*. According to certain ancient Scandinavian annals, Hamlet or Amleth (also Ambløthæ or Amlæd) was the grandson, through his mother Gerutha (Gertrude), of Hrethric, whose father was none other than Hrothgar. Such a lineage, observes Marijane Osborn, "makes the childless Amlæd 'the last of the Skjöldungs,' thereby completing the story that began with the coming of Scyld."[1] In pre-Shakespearean tradition, in other words, Amlæd might trace his line back to that Scyld Sheafing whose powerful memory informs the opening lines of *Beowulf*. This great poem, like *Hamlet*, readily lends itself to twentieth-century reconfiguration, and Gardner, reframing the Anglo-Saxon epic in *Grendel*, manages also to devise a corrective to the modern gloom that Shakespeare's play, according to Oscar Wilde, made modish. "Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it," declares Wilde. "The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy."[2]

Published only four years after the triumph of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* in the West End and on Broadway, *Grendel* is at once a textbook example of literary symbiosis and a timely dissent against the metaphysical premises of

both modernism and postmodernism. Not that Gardner lacks contemporary credentials. Like the modernists, he is a master of allusion (Blake and Swift figure with special importance here), and he performs pastiche with the best of the postmodernists, as one sees in *The Smugglers of Lost Souls' Rock*, the novel-within-the-novel in *October Light*, or in the faux-Poe short story "The Library Horror," in which an obsessive reader struggles with his conviction that characters are emerging from the shelves to haunt and even murder him. *Grendel*, however, is a little too imaginative and conceptually bold to be called pastiche. Not content simply to reframe *Beowulf*, Gardner transforms the rough-spun Anglo-Saxon fabric into cloth of gold.

Gardner "rewrites" a classic, but one must "not be misled," as Christian Moraru observes, "by the . . . apish prefix *re*." Moraru sees "multiply transformative functions" in such an exercise, which he rightly identifies as especially characteristic of the postmodern literary enterprise. "Rewriting," he adds, "transforms" not only "textual . . . but also ideological and political" elements to effect revisions that, "largely speaking," are ultimately "cultural."[3] Making its appearance shortly after *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern*, the Gardner novel engages themes similar to those of Stoppard's play. But here the existential premise is interrogated and subverted as the author resurrects both the heroic ideal and the art that fostered it.

Rewriting *Beowulf*, Gardner updates the venerable quarrel of ancients and moderns (from about 1690 in France and subsequently in eighteenth-century England, this was the much-debated question of whether contemporaneous authors—the moderns—could claim superiority to the great authors of antiquity, the ancients). Artfully echoing Jonathan Swift (like Pope a great apologist for the ancients), Gardner contrives in *Grendel* to make his eponymous narrator an unsavory modern twice over. Grendel asserts the validity of his own art over that of the illusion-mongering ancient—the scop—who told the story first. Like so many literary artists of the twentieth century, Grendel prides himself on tough-mindedness in the face of an indifferent cosmos. Like the practitioners who followed, improved on, and transformed modernist techniques, moreover, he manages to be quite amusing as he reviews and demolishes every transcendent ideal. But Gardner, the narrator behind the narrator, sides with the ancients, who, as he explains in his 1978 polemic *On Moral Fiction*, strove to create myths by which to live, myths that celebrated "models of virtue" and fostered civilization building.[4] Gardner's *Grendel* is that rarity, the postmodern symbiont that privileges its textual host: from within Grendel's self-serving tale, the Ur-narrative speaks its greater truth and exposes the twentieth century's dominant aesthetic to a trenchant critique. The real protagonist of Grendel's narrative is

the Shaper, whose artistic vision gives the lie to the modish posturing of the witty but deeply misguided modern who presumes to improve on one of the founding narratives of British civilization. Grendel's story subverts itself.

To iterate: according to John Gardner, the credit for Grendel's defeat ought properly to go to the Shaper, not to the beefy and humorless Beowulf. Proof against the small-scale heroics of the territorial imperative, Grendel might have continued to harass the Scyldings indefinitely had art not shaped a more substantial heroic ideal to nurture a deliverer. But Gardner goes beyond making the Shaper his hero. He makes Grendel the narrator of his novel, and in that role the monster becomes in effect the Shaper's rival artist. Thus the battle between Grendel and Beowulf, a contest of strength, takes second place in importance to the indirect competition between Grendel and the Shaper—a contest of art. The story ultimately concerns the triumph of good art over bad, for in it Grendel manages only self-indictment. He unwittingly produces a case history of the bad artist, as John Gardner—or Jonathan Swift—would define such a monster.

Gardner inadvertently misled a few critics with his remark, in an interview, about Grendel's becoming an artist when Beowulf twists his arm and makes him sing: "At the end of the novel Grendel himself becomes the Shaper. Beowulf bangs his head against the wall and says, *feel*. Grendel feels—his head hurts—so Beowulf makes him sing about walls. When the Shaper dies a kid is chosen to succeed him, but the real successor is Grendel."[5] Gardner means, I think, that Grendel, abandoning all pretense of apostolic deference, ought in the end to be recognized as practitioner of an art inimical to that of his great predecessor. His artistic work does not, however, begin under the brutal tutelage of Beowulf. His story must in fact be recognized as that of an artist from start to finish, as one can see by a kind of argument-from-design: only a resourceful, professional storyteller could have produced such an artful narrative. Susan Strehle, who sees that "the novel traces the development of Grendel's artistry," points out how the later chapters "include long sections of poetry in a variety of literary forms."[6] Yet those later, "lyrical" chapters must not blind us to the artistry in play from the very beginning. In the book's incrementally poetic structure, in fact, readers see the calculated effect of an artist whose control manifests itself equally in every part of his narrative. Even at the beginning, he embellishes his tale with poetic devices, especially the alliteration typical of Anglo-Saxon versification: "[t]hese brainless budding trees, these brattling birds"; "stirrings of springtime"; "life-bloated, baffled, long-suffering hag." From the first line's "old ram" that "cocks his head like an elderly, slow-

witted king," simile and metaphor also figure prominently in his artistic repertoire.[7]

Grendel introduces and often refers to himself as one perennially engaged—like any poet or novelist—in "[s]pinning a web of words" (pp. 8, 15, 29). But this figure implies the activity of a spider, and Gardner means to signal Grendel's aesthetic affinity with the arachnid moderns denounced in Swift's 1704 satire *The Battle of the Books*. Swift, one recalls, depicts moderns as noxious spiders, ancients as industrious, wholesome bees. When he asks, "Pray, gentlemen, was ever anything so modern as the spider in his air, his turns, and his paradoxes?" one thinks of Gardner's Grendel: "I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick. . . . I cry, and hug myself, and laugh, letting out salt tears, he he! Till I fall down gasping and sobbing. (It's mostly fake.)" (p. 6). Gardner's monster embraces the negative literary philosophy of the twentieth century's moderns, the Shaper the more enlightened and honorable aesthetic of the ancients. Gardner underscores his point through subtle allusions to Swift's bees and spiders: "arresting as a voice from a hollow tree" (that natural apiary), the Shaper, in performance, gives the lie to the arachnid aesthetic of Grendel, ever spinning his web (p. 41). In a famous passage, Swift's spider

> argues . . . with many boastings of his native stock and great genius; that he spins and spits wholly from himself, and scorns to own any obligation or assistance from without. . . . To all this the bee, as an advocate retained by us, the Ancients, thinks fit to answer, that, if one may judge of the great genius or inventions of the Moderns by what they have produced, you will hardly have countenance to bear you out in boasting of either. Erect your schemes with as much method and skill as you please; yet, if the materials be nothing but dirt, spun out of your own entrails (the guts of modern brains), the edifice will conclude at last in a cobweb; the duration of which, like that of other spiders' webs, may be imputed to their being forgotten, or neglected, or hid in a corner. For anything else of genuine that the Moderns may pretend to, I cannot recollect; unless it be a large vein of wrangling and satire, much of a nature and substance with the spiders' poison; which, however they pretend to spit wholly out of themselves, is improved by the same arts, by feeding upon the insects and vermin of the age. As for us, the Ancients, we are content with the bee, to pretend to nothing of our own beyond our wings and our voice: that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got has been by infinite labour and search, and ranging through every corner of nature; the dif-

> ference is, that, instead of dirt and poison, we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax; thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light.[8]

Gardner, like Swift, invites his reader to reflect on the literary values that endure—and those that do not. He rejects the bleak metaphysics of the twentieth century's literary arachnids (only the latest of those to be styled "modern"), whose oft-expressed nostalgia for antiquity too often found expression in tendentious (even protofascistic) valuations of order and social hierarchy. For Gardner, however, the great writers of the past—the ancients—produced a literature of humane affirmation that was inspirational and profoundly enabling. He refuses to accept as definitive the pessimistic worldview of either the moderns or the postmoderns—especially if deference to that negative metaphysics perpetuates our spiritual prostration.

Arachnid Art

Though Grendel is an artist throughout his narrative, he has not been an artist all his life. His artistic vocation dates from his first encounter with the Shaper; consequently he describes his career before the coming of the bard—in chapter 2 and most of chapter 3—in language more prosaic than that obtaining in the rest of the narrative. On that first appearance at Heorot, the Shaper sings of great Scyld and the line he founded, and Grendel, confused and troubled, cannot get the poetry out of his head as he makes his way home. "At the top of the cliffwall I turned and looked down, and I saw all the lights of Hrothgar's realm and the realms beyond that, that would soon be his, and to clear my mind, I sucked in wind and screamed. The sound went out, violent, to the rims of the world, and after a moment it bounced back up at me—harsh and ungodly against the sigh of the remembered harp—like a thousand tortured rat-squeals crying: *Lost!*" (p. 45). This scream is, I think, Grendel's earliest attempt at an artistic response to experience. It is the uncouth utterance, the "barbaric yawp," of a fledgling poet. But at the same time that he reports on his nascent artistry, Grendel works in figures of speech that quietly discover a later mastery. Indeed, the barbaric yawp is preceded by a simile that reveals the presence of the mature artist behind the description of the immature one: "The yellow lights of peasant huts were like scattered jewels on the ravendark cloak of a king" (p. 44). It is a rather sophisticated simile at that, since it hosts a secondary comparison—the metaphoric "ravendark"—and expresses admirably the future status of far-flung peasant villages.

Grendel, then, is the Shaper's shadow pupil. But Grendel does not, like the Shaper, offer a vision of heroic possibility. He does not change his audience for the better. However verbally gifted, he lacks the power of a transforming imagination, as he himself dimly realizes when he comments on his early imitation of the Shaper:

> 'Well then he's changed them,' I said. . . .
>
> 'He reshapes the world. . . . So his name implies. He stares strange-eyed at the mindless world and turns dry sticks to gold.'
>
> A little poetic, I would readily admit. His manner of speaking was infecting me, making me pompous. 'Nevertheless,' I whispered crossly—but I couldn't go on, too conscious all at once of my whispering, my eternal posturing, always transforming the world with words—changing nothing. (pp. 48–49)

What kind of artist, having such knowledge and such power, declines to "shape" a wholesome world in which human beings strive to be loyal, heroic, farseeing, and decent? According to Gardner, only a woefully benighted or downright vicious artist could fail so signally in her or his responsibility to the community. Too many modern writers, Gardner implies, seem to have shrugged, like the poet of an earlier generation, and said: "Play no tricks upon thy soul, O man; / Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can." The bad artist, like Grendel, lets "fact be fact" and changes nothing; the good artist, like the Shaper (who insists that life is what we make it and changes everything) is our true deliverer.

Grendel frequently articulates his dubious metaphysical and aesthetic perspective. On more than one occasion, he imagines the nothingness beneath existence. "I recall something," he remarks: "A void boundless as a nether sky. I hang by the twisted roots of an oak, looking down into immensity" (p. 137). The vision returns when the Geatish hero bests him. "I am . . . falling through bottomless space—*Wa*!—snatching at the huge twisted roots of an oak . . . a blinding flash of fire . . . no, darkness" (p. 169). At the end, breathing his last, he looks into the void that will presently swallow him: "With my one weak arm I cling to the huge twisted roots of an oak. I look down past stars to a terrifying darkness" (p. 173). As Helen B. Ellis and Warren U. Ober have pointed out, Gardner's language in these passages comes from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.[9] Unlike Blake's speaker, Grendel fails to see that his void is the result of perceptual habits (what Sir Francis Bacon called "Idols of the Theater"). Blake's speaker discovers that the "nether sky" with which he has been affrighted is an illusion, along with the terrible, wheeling spiders awaiting him therein. Once freed

from this illusion he finds himself on a pleasant moonlit bank listening to a harper and bathing, as it were, in sweetness and light.[10] Gardner's reader is expected to remember Blake's harper (instrumental in putting to flight the Puritan's idea of hell) and relate him to Gardner's, who offers an alternative to our modern hell of nihilism and despair.

Bad artists, in Gardner's view, are not merely careless, conceited, or immoral. They are *monstrous*. The author, who could have made the Shaper's invidious rival an ordinary mortal, pointedly makes him the supreme antagonist, the monster that by definition embodies nature gone malign and riotous. Thus Grendel plays a variety of symbolic roles—including some that might appear mutually exclusive. He is, for example, a distillation or projection of humanity's least appealing appetites at the same time that he is an embodiment of the entire nonhuman universe, conceived as sentient and single-mindedly malevolent. If the malignity of the universe is something conferred on it by the human imagination, individuals nevertheless advance the cause and the conception of their own humanity by such projections. The dragon delivers a cynical lecture on humanity's curious debt to Grendel: "You improve them, my boy! . . . You stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from—the blunt facts of their mortality, their abandonment—that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You *are* mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain" (pp. 72–73).

Irony accumulates around the dragon's final asseveration: "You *are* mankind." Grendel dwells within the human heart as much as without, and the monster's exclusion from the meadhall and the human community it represents is recognizably an attempt to banish, through the instrumentality of civilization itself, humanity's own baser instincts. Grendel reifies those parts of our inner being that we trust least or fear most, those passions or appetites driven deep into the unconscious, from whence they manifest themselves without harm only in dreams or works of the imagination. This monster, after all, is the creation of art, or rather of the artist who dreams public dreams for us, making us shiver at the ghastly things called up, with such insouciance and sangfroid, from the depths of the unconscious. Contemplation of monsters in works of the imagination is thus indirectly instructive and chastening; to the extent that some kind of vicarious release figures, it is even cathartic. But along with common repressions, works of art also reflect private concerns that are not necessarily unconscious or

pathological. John Gardner, for example, is surely drawn to this avatar of Cain—and moved to tell his story in the first person—by the complex of emotions deriving from the fact that years ago he accidentally killed *his* brother.[11] "It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder," says Claudius in *Hamlet*, and one need not have committed murder in the first degree to suffer the guilt—as the misery of the brother-killer and flawed hero Unferth reveals.

But one finds such superficial psychologizing less interesting and important than the perfectly conscious symbolism whereby Gardner projects himself into the novel as two kinds of artist, both quite appealing in different ways. Why does Gardner make his villain so winsome and droll? The answer lies partly in the author's willingness to do justice to the kind of artist Grendel represents. Behind Grendel are a host of witty and appealing modern and postmodern writers—Nathanael West, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller—who sugarcoat their bleak themes with amusing patter. But more specifically, Grendel is allowed to be charming and frequently cogent because he is modeled on a writer for whom Gardner felt a reluctant admiration: Jean-Paul Sartre. Gardner considered the French philosopher a mistaken thinker with the ability to

> write like an angel. That's the thing that fascinates me. Sartre is my great love-hate, kind of because he's a horror intellectually, figuratively, and morally, but he's a wonderful writer and anything he says you believe, at least for the moment, because of the way he says it. . . . What happened in *Grendel* was that I got the idea of presenting the Beowulf monster as Jean-Paul Sartre, and everything Grendel says Sartre in one mood or another has said, so that my love of Sartre kind of comes through as my love of the monster, though monsters are still monsters—I hope.[12]

One notes here a tremendous ambivalence towards the thing decried; monster or *philosophe*, Grendel is an intimate part of John Gardner—whether as intellectual freight for the conscious mind or as mythic projection of the unconscious. (Given the French pedigree for Grendel, incidentally, one begins to recognize in the creature rendered by Gardner's illustrator, Emil Antonucci, the lineaments of the splendid monster in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*.)

The existentialism of Sartre provides a point of reference for Gardner's plan, in *Grendel*, "to go through the main ideas of Western civilization."[13] Craig J. Stromme, taking Gardner's hint that these formative ideas number roughly twelve, has argued that they are taken up seriatim in the novel's

twelve chapters.[14] One suspects, however, that the author of *Grendel* has not conceived its philosophical content so schematically. After all, the important ideas explored in the book number rather more than twelve: Gardner manages to scan major social and economic ideas like chivalry, feudalism, and mercantilism; theology from primitive animism to Kierkegaard, with side glances at Asian religions; metaphysics from Hume to Sartre and from Heidegger to Whitehead; and political philosophy—the origins, legitimacy, and accountability of the state—from Plato to Locke and Hobbes and from Machiavelli to Marx and Georges Sorel. Surprisingly, this ranging of the ideational vast neither confuses nor distracts, for the ideas examined are dramatically integrated and subordinated to the aesthetic question—how to construe the moral responsibility of the artist—that for Gardner subsumes all others.

Like Samuel Johnson in *Rasselas*, the author of *Grendel* reviews, in the various ideas taken up, the possibilities for optimism about the human condition, and in this respect the novel does not differ radically from the Ur-story, *Beowulf*. Projecting a fatalistic awareness of human mortality and the mutability of all glories, the *Beowulf* poet also surveys the claims of statecraft, familial love, heroism, and loyalty to gainsay the passing of all things: great persons, great beauty, great nations. *Beowulf* at once endorses and questions the values of the society it describes; it glorifies the ancient, heroic ideals espoused by the pagan ancestors of its Christian audience at the same time that it reveals how little those ideals mean without the rationale provided by Christian faith. With *Grendel* the situation is exactly reversed. Where the earlier audience could look back on the pagan past and congratulate itself on its spiritual enlightenment, the modern audience looks back on a Christian past and laments its disillusionment. The desperate spiritual situation of the Scyldings mirrors our own.

In *Beowulf* the spiritual critique of the poem's action emerges through a strategy of biblical allusion. For example, the poet draws a direct parallel between Hrothgar's splendid meadhall, Heorot, and God's creation as described in Genesis. When he subsequently hints that Heorot will one day perish in a terrible conflagration, the reader may recall that Christian prophecy describes a similar fate for the world. The poet, however, makes no direct reference to Revelation, because—though he frequently alludes to the Old Testament—he consistently refuses to mention the New Testament and its message of redemption for a fallen world. Thus he pretends, as it were, to be an artist with only half of a Judeo-Christian heritage at his disposal. From this odd vantage he imagines pagans capable at best of a fitful monotheism, for the Scyldings stood in desperate need of the Christian

message that had recently—perhaps within living memory—come to *Beowulf*'s first audience. Critics have argued that the *Beowulf* poet suppressed New Testament references so that the audience, wondering at his reticence, would the more readily see the heroic deliverer, Beowulf, as an allegorical Christ. Gardner himself, in *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, cites the many details that justify an allegorical reading of the poem:

> The hero is unquestionably "Christlike": as Beowulf alone overcame the demonic enemy of all (699), Christ overcame the devil; as Beowulf's mother might well say that "the God of Old was kind to her in her childbearing" (942b sq.), so the Virgin might say; as Beowulf's men give up all hope in the ninth hour (1600a), so did the disciples at the crucifixion; and as Beowulf was survived by twelve, so was Christ. . . . In his first great battle, Beowulf killed nine sea monsters; Christ in his first great battle expelled defectors from nine angelic legions. . . . The Grendel's Mere episode is parallel to Christ's crucifixion and harrowing of hell. . . . And the dragon episode may have to do, on its deepest level, with Armageddon and Last Judgment.[15]

In the ultimate victory the deliverer triumphs over "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil" (Rev. 20:2). Indeed, Beowulf's three monstrous antagonists remind one of Milton's chthonic trinity: Satan; his self-begotten paramour, Sin; and their incestuous issue, Death. (Though probably inapplicable to *Beowulf* directly, the Miltonic paradigm provides an intriguing clue to the identity of Grendel's absentee father.) Like Christ, the hero must lay down his life to defeat the satanic dragon, but as the poet ends his story, the allegory, which Gardner suggests may be "ironic," is allowed to disperse. When Beowulf prepares for his burial as a mortal and a pagan, and when his people learn of their bleak future, the poet provides a final reminder of the emptiness of heroism and glory not validated by the Christian dispensation.

Gardner scrupulously follows the action, details, and symbolism of the original poem. In *Beowulf*, for example, the number twelve figures importantly: Grendel's ravages last "twelve winters"; Hrothgar's gifts to the successful hero include a helmet, sword, mailshirt, battle-banner, and eight horses; and eleven companions and a traitor appear in the dragon sequence. Numerologically significant, the recurring twelve is the product of three and four, associated with triune godhead and the primal elements: earth, air, water, and fire. These figures represent the spiritual and the material; multiplied together, according to the medieval numerologist Hugh of St.

Victor, they produce a number symbolic of the universe.[16] Thus Gardner, in his novel, recounts the twelve months of the twelfth year of the monster's war on Hrothgar and the Scyldings, and the squaring of the symbolic number underscores its cosmic significance. "Twelve is, I hope, a holy number" (p. 92), says Grendel with unconscious irony.

Each of the twelve chapters of *Grendel* unfolds, as it were, under a different astrological symbol, from the sign of the ram to the sign of the fish. The account of a year's cycle, the novel reflects the profoundly mythic rhythms of the annual revolution of the seasons. The beginning in Aries has its precedent, of course, in *The Canterbury Tales* and in *The Waste Land*, and indeed Gardner is mediating between Chaucer's worldview and Eliot's. If the novel's trajectory towards that ancient life-symbol, the fish, seems to rehearse Eliot's own spiritual journey, both the narrator and the author stop short of embracing, as Eliot did, the Christian faith.[17] The journey thus chronicled—the mental traveling, so to speak—complements the progression or passing-in-review of those "main ideas" that culminate in a modern worldview that is, broadly speaking, "existentialist," for the narrator, as we have seen, is an arch-existentialist who witnesses and shakes his head, sadly or contemptuously, over the unfolding of those ideas. But Grendel's philosophical perspective, so enormously influential in shaping the dominant outlook of our time, is itself subtly undercut—like the heroic pretensions of *Beowulf*'s ancient Danes—by an artist sensitive to the tragic implications of a flawed world picture. Like his spiritual ancestor, the creator of *Beowulf*, Gardner embraces an art undergirded by a philosophy rather more sanguine than the one he is constrained, by historical and literary circumstance, to deal with.

The novel's epigraph, from William Blake's "The Mental Traveller," also hints that Grendel's view will not prevail. Blake's poem concerns a miraculous "Babe" whose growth and decline, according to W. M. Rossetti, represent the career of any public idea—first attacked, then deferred to, and at last supplanted by a newer idea.[18] Like Grendel, Blake's Babe inspires fear and revulsion in certain phases of his life cycle; the ghastly "Woman Old" who attends him even reminds one of Grendel's mother. In fact, the poem can be made to annotate the novel at several points. For example, one of the great public ideas the Babe represents is Christianity, and Blake adumbrates, especially in the stanzas following the one Gardner cites in his epigraph, features of Christ's passion in the Babe's career: "She binds iron thorns around his head, / She pierces both his hands and feet, / She cuts his heart out at his side." Eventually the Babe becomes a "bleeding youth" and the formerly anile companion a "Virgin Bright." In linking his ideational

Babe to Christ, Blake asserts that the world will always martyr the bringer of a new dispensation. Hardly orthodox in his religion, he also hints that Christianity itself will eventually give way to something new; beneath the trappings of this or that religion, however, lies a truth that will not change, for the Babe remains the same from cycle to cycle. Gardner follows the poem in providing the otherwise demonic Grendel with certain Christlike attributes. After all, he is arguably the product of a virgin birth, and, as will be seen in more detail presently, he undergoes a kind of crucifixion.

Lines toward the end of the poem also sound relevant to Grendel, for the Babe, poised between the end of one cycle and the beginning of another, seems particularly fearsome:

> But when they find the frowning Babe,
> Terror strikes thro' the region wide,
> They cry 'The Babe! the Babe is born!'
> And flee away on Every side.
> But who dare touch the frowning form,
> His arm is wither'd at its root.

In this passage one sees not only Grendel, but also—especially in the last two lines—Grendel's victor, for at the tearing off of an arm, Grendel's day passes, and Beowulf's day begins. Thus the epigraph allows Gardner to remind his reader that however persuasive and final the prevailing worldview seems, it is still destined, like all the world-swaying ideas before it, for the scrap heap or the museum—just as the comfortless and fatalistic ethos of the heathen Scyldings eventually gave way, in the time of the *Beowulf* poet, to the sunnier idea of Christian humanism. The something immutable that Blake intuited beneath the surface of perishable Christianity is still valid, Gardner would insist, even though there is as yet no new formulation of it consistent with the modern temper.

Like Blake's poem, Gardner's novel is circular in form. Certain chapters begin and end with the same words and phrases, and the novel as a whole, having rehearsed one full cycle, Aries to Pisces, ends where it began. The message as well as the medium, the circle is an ancient symbol of eternity, perfection, and faith—and not least because it is the emblem of the annual round, the yearly progression of the seasons. This cycle, culminating in spring's yearly triumph over wintry death, provides Gardner with the substructure of his novel and the great counter to Grendel's dreary metaphysics. Beowulf, brutal pedagogue, inculcates the lesson of the natural cycle and its message of hope: "*Where the water was rigid there will be fish, and*

men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not. Though you murder the world, turn plains to stone, transmogrify life into I and it, strong searching roots will crack your cave and rain will cleanse it: The world will burn green, sperm build again" (p. 170).

The Future of an Illusion

Yet Gardner has at no point suggested that anything about the natural cycle cancels the absoluteness of death for the individual. The stirring arrival of spring, with its resurgence of life, does not prevent the passing of the Shaper (who dies like Leonardo, with a sovereign in attendance) or the decline into the feebleness before death of Hrothgar and his mighty kingdom. In the emphasis placed on the discontent of Hrothgar's nephew Hrothulf, Gardner foreshadows the destruction of Heorot and all it represents. A more subtle augury of the same event appears in a portentous description of a hunt. In the chapter narrated under the sign of Sagittarius, one of Hrothgar's bowmen slays a hart, the majestic creature from which the king's great hall takes it name. The hart "lies as still as the snow hurtling outward around him to the hushed world's rim," and even Grendel worries over its death. "The image clings to my mind like a growth. I sense some riddle in it" (p. 127). But the inevitable destruction of Heorot and the world it symbolizes does not invalidate the affirmation Gardner puts into the mouth of Beowulf. Life's return, spring after spring, provides no inconsiderable counterbalance to the horrors of personal and, in time, cosmic oblivion. Only Death itself, only an entity excluded absolutely and by its very nature from the communion of all living things, could loathe the season of renewal as Grendel does.

Nature's rhythms are stable and comforting, even though they include death along with life. From the vantage of its conclusion, the novel's opening scene reveals itself as a distillation of the entire story, for Grendel here protests too much his hatred of the spring. The "old ram" of the first line stands his ground in the face of Grendel's threats because of something bigger and vastly more powerful than either: "The season is upon us" (p. 5). But to a being like Grendel, blind to or contemptuous of nature's contradiction of himself, the vernal season can only bring pain and frustration. The ram's stubbornness anticipates that of the goat in Chapter 10, which refuses to be intimidated as it climbs towards a height occupied by Grendel. With frightful bloodshed the monster systematically destroys the goat, but the creature keeps coming, even after it is technically "dead," and

thus becomes an emblem of life's blind, undeniable tenacity—life, under the wintry sign of Capricorn, fighting its way upward, towards the vernal efflorescence.

"It is the business of rams to be rams and of goats to be goats" (p. 165), Grendel reflects cryptically before he meets Beowulf for their fated struggle, the mythic agon of winter and spring. But to identify the monster as an incarnation of winter, or death, scarcely does justice to the extraordinary complexity of Gardner's mythmaking. In Grendel's history the author has gone beyond eclectic demonology to anatomize the development of religion itself, from primitive, animistic belief to sophisticated theology. Intimately bound up with the origins of religion, the seasonal progression that structures the novel provides an ideal backdrop for Gardner's treatment of the religious impulse in its various cultural phases.

One sees the breadth and subtlety of this author's handling of primitive religion in the way he associates Grendel, or at least Grendel's arm, with the theories of Sir James George Frazer concerning the legendary Golden Bough, the talisman required by Aeneas to visit—and return from—the underworld. Frazer theorized that the Golden Bough was really the mistletoe that grows parasitically on various trees, especially the oak that figures in the Virgilian account.[19] Frazer's parasite reminds one of Grendel when first encountered by human beings. Trapped in an oak tree, he is taken at first for a "growth" or "fungus" (p. 24), then as an "oaktree spirit" (p. 25). Grendel shares with the Golden Bough an invulnerability to weapons. As the Cumaean Sibyl tells Aeneas, no blade can hew the Golden Bough; it must be plucked, and only by one smiled on by fate. Thus the blades of the Scyldings are ineffective against Grendel, and only the heroic Beowulf, a Nordic Aeneas favored by fate, is able to strip off a "branch." As Aeneas hangs up the Golden Bough at the gates of Elysium, so the Scyldings hang up Grendel's arm at Heorot. When Grendel's mother bears it off, necessitating the desperate pursuit to her subterranean cave, it even becomes, in a sense, Beowulf's ticket to the underworld.

The world of *Grendel*, however plausibly that of ancient Scandinavia, is also purely archetypal. Thus Grendel's discoverers, the youthful Hrothgar and his companions, enact, as it were, a tableau: primitive humanity encountering a supernatural world that requires propitiation. "Go get the thing some pigs" (p. 26), Hrothgar orders. Quickly promoted from oaktree spirit to hellish inventor of fratricide, Grendel becomes part of a more elaborate theology and its complementary demonology, as we see when the Shaper relates the Cain story and when the priests pray to the "ghostly Destroyer" (p. 127) to deliver them from the world-rim-walker. As the in-

creasing sophistication of the characters telescopes humanity's entire social evolution, the rise of Grendel (and the propitiation of Grendel) condenses the development of all religion. "He's in a period of transition" (26), observes one of Grendel's discoverers. The joke behind this amusingly anachronistic remark is that they, too, are in a period of transition.

If to the Scyldings Grendel remains always the archenemy, to the reader he seems at times more divine than demonic, for he undergoes a crucifixion that would seem to link him to myths of the divine scapegoat. Suspended by one foot from his cross of living wood, the double oak tree, he becomes the "hanged man" of the Tarot, which T. S. Eliot effectively transformed into the universal emblem of divine sacrifice. Though Grendel's suffering here invites comparison to that of the crucified Christ, his passion seems closest to that of the Norse god Odin, who obtained power and knowledge—notably of poetry—through his self-crucifixion on Yggdrasil, the world tree or *axis mundi*. The roots of the world tree descend into the void, and again one thinks of those visions of gnarled roots and the abyss into which they disappear that recur to Grendel at various times in the years after his escape from the tree.

Odin's passion was the price of his knowledge of certain esoterica, and Grendel, too, learns from his painful experience. Indeed, the suffering of gods and heroes is frequently associated with the acquisition of knowledge. Prometheus suffers for bringing knowledge to humanity, and Christ suffers—on a cross symbolically identified with the Tree of Knowledge—for Adam and Eve's impious seizing of an apple from that tree. Thus Grendel's existential knowledge of the universe dates from his passion in a tree. "I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly—as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink.—An ugly god pitifully dying in a tree!" (pp. 21–22).

But Grendel's passion is unredemptive, and the knowledge he gains amounts to little more than a refinement of his own self-absorption. A parody-scapegoat, he merely impersonates a savior. Such an inchoate messiah—generically called the "trickster" because his suffering is usually occasioned by his cruelty, pranks, and general destructiveness—is not uncommon among primitive peoples. Carl Gustav Jung, analyzing the figure of the trickster in myth and legend, notes "his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures, and—last but not least—his

approximation to the figure of a savior."[20] Jung believed that the trickster modulates, in the mythology of more advanced societies, into more benign gods, including authentic scapegoat figures who sacrifice themselves for the good of humanity. He saw the trickster as a "'forerunner' of the saviour, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being."[21] Few tricksters fit the model as perfectly as Grendel. But though he suffers like the divine scapegoat, Grendel never rises to savior status. The redemptive function is displaced, partly onto the Shaper and partly onto Beowulf. One can even think of these two as God the Father, creator of the heroic ideal that will save the people, and God the Son, agent of the deliverance.

One can complete the trinity by including the shaping spirit that broods over experiential chaos to bring fictive order: John Gardner. The implied affinity between artistic and divine creation is of course a commonplace; Gardner himself once remarked that "the true story teller . . . is a model for all artists—intuition in the service of King Reason—therefore the eternal artist, God on earth."[22] But the divine artist must vie with the demonic competition. Viewing Grendel as a trickster-god who does not evolve into something more benign is essentially the same as viewing him as an artist, the Shaper's unwitting apprentice, whose talent is perverted. Without ever really understanding why, Grendel "cannot help but admire" (p. 12) the Shaper. Refuting the things affirmed by the Shaper proves difficult for the monster, however well he knows that the empirical facts of existence run counter to the way the bard represents them. Angry to see how "lies" allow humans to flourish, Grendel assumes the task of reminding them—through his art as well as his predations—of the elemental and brutal reality of which he is himself the chief symbol.

In doing so he resembles certain no-nonsense modern and contemporary artists. "Surely," opines John Updike, "morality in fiction is accuracy and truth. The world has changed, and in a sense we are all heirs to despair. Better to face this and tell the truth, however dismal."[23] But Gardner frequently denounced such complacent and Grendel-like asseverations. When literary artists devote themselves, as Grendel does, to reminding their readers of the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, they undermine values that, however provisional, make civilization possible. Art is often described as subversive, but the subversiveness is properly aimed at narrow-minded pieties and smugness. If art poses a threat to something vastly more substantial than the values of the middle class, and if, moreover, it does so out of a smug complacency about the sacredness of its mission ("truth"), then according to Gardner it has lost touch with its real mission—the enhance-

ment of life. "Real art," he affirms, "creates myths a society can live instead of die by, and clearly our society is in need of such myths."[24]

The message of the modern artist who recognizes only the responsibility to tell the dismal truth resembles—superficially—that of the artist in the Middle Ages or Renaissance who frequently recurred to the theme of life's impermanence and the world's transitoriness. Shakespeare's Cardinal Wolsey, reflecting on his own rise and fall, expresses conventional sentiments:

> This is the state of man: today he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hopes, tomorrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honors thick upon him;
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
> His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
> And then he falls, as I do.[25]

The killing frost would seem to be, like Grendel, an emblem of the impersonal and arbitrary hostility of the cosmos, for a recognition of the role of accident in human affairs links the art of the past with that of the present. But a Shakespeare or a Chaucer saw the mischance that stalks the brightest of human hopes as merely the work of Fortuna, goddess of vicissitude, and they could take comfort in the knowledge that her power extended only to the sublunary sphere. In the literature of their day, men and women were counseled directly or indirectly to remember the world beyond, where Fortuna held no sway: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." Now, however, the artist reminds humanity of mutability and transience without the qualifying message of religion, and the result is a literature of despair and the cultural vitiation it fosters.

Gardner, of course, cannot offer religion as an antidote to the aesthetic and moral paralysis of his age. Indeed, his novel contains, in the dragon, a highly dyslogistic parody of the Judeo-Christian god. "Dragons don't mess with your piddling free will" (p. 63), declares this cynical deity. "BE STILL" (pp. 61, 62), he screams, echoing the Psalmist's "be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). Gardner would seem to have little patience with conventional religion—though he is not above invoking the fish symbol in connection with the heroic Beowulf. Yet Beowulf, the ostensible savior, will hardly satisfy a twentieth- or twenty-first-century audience predisposed to dubiety regarding the prospects for "affirmation." For all his magnificence, he is merely a pasteboard figure. Gardner expects his readers to see that the real savior of his people and confounder of their nemesis is the artist,

or collective artist, who shapes the heroic ideal that produces a Beowulf. Admittedly, the Shaper, somewhat eclipsed by Grendel's depredations, cannot sing this plague away; in fact, the monster demonstrates repeatedly the mendacity and weakness of the bard. But Grendel himself can never shake off the poet's magic, and one does well to remember, with Pound's Sextus Propertius, that much of history survives only because poets thought it worth celebrating. A real Beowulf may once have lived, but posterity would long have forgotten him had he not found his memorial in art—art like that which doubtless shaped *his* heroism, provided *him* with values and ideals.

Gardner need not remind his reader of Beowulf's debt to art explicitly. For one thing, to do so would violate the principle of indirection, that fundamental canon of art. Beowulf strides into the story undiminished because that stalking horse, Unferth, has already served as illustration of the hero's debt to the art that first conceived his heroism as something beyond an animal's marking of territory.[26] Though Unferth lacks the wit to realize his own origins, one is not fooled by his declaration: "Poetry's trash, mere clouds of words, comfort to the hopeless" (p. 88). These words, ironically, are perfectly true, yet Unferth—not to mention Beowulf—is nonetheless a "creation," in every sense of the word, of poetry. After all, Unferth is "a new kind of Scylding" (p. 86)—the kind that will pursue the monster to its den, whatever the odds. The appearance of this new kind of Scylding follows that of the Shaper, for heroes are made, not born.

Gardner, then, advocates an art like the Shaper's, an art that improves as it delights, making audiences or readers less crippled by the Angst, insecurity, cruelty, and disorder that diminish their humanity. Dramatizing the argument, Grendel and the Shaper engage in what the Germans call a *Sängerkrieg*, a battle of song. Their competition, like that of the sneering Beckmesser and the noble Walther von der Vogelweide in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, involves not only skill and invention but also aesthetic principles. The attentive reader, alert to the novel's contest of art, will see how much the world stands to gain from the victory of the moral artist.

10 *STRETTO* CONCLUSION

The Lyric Symbiont

Stretto: a kind of fugal exposition in miniature. Late in a fugue, the composer will often repeat—at an accelerated tempo—the statement of the musical subject in its various voices. Hence Thomas Pynchon, describing the rapid alteration of weather in the days around a February episode of "false spring," speaks of "a *stretto* passage in the year's fugue."[1] Hence, too, a conceit for concluding the present study—a fugal recapitulation of the symbiotic "subject" in the "voices" introduced in the preceding chapters: Oedipal tensions, reading and misreading, deconstruction, epistemic dialogue, and grapplings with the exhaustion of forms and language. Inasmuch as I have hitherto considered these properties or elements of symbiosis in terms of fiction, drama, and the long poem, I propose to conclude and summarize with examples from lyric poetry—in which, as in the other genres studied, the literary present energizes itself by reconfiguring the remote or proximate literary past.

Symbiotic poems, however, prove somewhat less exemplary than one might wish. Although lyric verse is commonly a vehicle for the expression of personal feelings, the lyric guest seems seldom to discover Oedipal dynamics. Not that lyrics are uncongenial to Oedipal sentiments (I have previously remarked Shakespeare's tendency, in the sonnets, to characterize the Dark Lady as a mother, the aristocratic patron, however young, as a father), but for some reason guest poets seem to see themselves more firmly as collaborators and equals than as "children." Perhaps because of this psychologically unproblematic relationship, their engagements with host texts, though sometimes adversarial or hostile, tend to involve little—*pace* Bloom—in the way of actual misreading.

At the same time, one expects more examples of lyric symbiosis, if not misprision on the wing, than in fact present themselves. The relative paucity of examples may have something to do with the cloud of "anxiety" Bloom descries on every poetic horizon: perhaps, among lyric poets, the cachet of originality dies hard. But at least such symbiotic verse as comes to hand—I shall presently consider poems by Marlowe, Raleigh, Sidney, and Shakespeare, by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and by Stevie Smith, Howard Moss, and Philip Larkin—proves interestingly varied, with guests and hosts paired both contemporaneously and across whole centuries. Moreover, one has a last-chapter topic conducive to conclusional brevity.

At times the relationship between host and guest can be almost too cozy and tensionless. In "When You Are Old," for example, Yeats does not *misread* Ronsard's "Quand Vous Serez Bien Vieille"; rather, in the act of translating it, he blithely commits an act of literary theft. Robert Lowell, less bold, pays homage to a number of poets by simply imitating or cannibalizing particular works. His collection *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) includes poems based on works by Rimbaud, Valéry, Rilke, Cobbett, Sextus Propertius, and Jonathan Edwards. Lowell devoted a later volume, *Imitations* (1961), entirely to derivative poems of this type. Hardly qualifying as a symbiotic poet (or, in justice to Bloom, a strong one), Lowell concerns himself with little more than respectful, "safe" readings, recasting in fresh language and images the words of his sources. In certain lines this is beautifully done, as when the epitaph requested by the ghost of Propertius's Cynthia goes from the original

> "Here in Tiburtine soil lies golden Cynthia.
> Greater the glory now of your banks
> O River Anio!"[2]

to an epitaph actually spoken by the river:

> 'Propertius, Cynthia is here:
> She shakes her blossoms when my waters clear.'[3]

But for the most part, Lowell goes only a step or two beyond simple translation. He makes little attempt to exploit the potential resonances and discords of a two-thousand-year gap between original and translation.

Ezra Pound, who also translates Propertius, insists that his readers encounter the Roman poet as simultaneously a "classic" and a contemporary. He does so, in references to "erasers" and "frigidaire patents," with a deft and judicious use of anachronism. Thus when Propertius applauds himself for preferring love to war as poetic subject, Pound contrives to make a con-

temporaneous (1919) reader reflect on the great conflict recently fought to a standstill:

> The primitive ages sang Venus,
> the last sings of a tumult,
> And I also will sing war when this matter of a girl is exhausted.[4]

By conferring modern tonalities—and meanings—on classic texts, Pound single-handedly crafts a new subgenre, the translation with license. His work in this area—obvious examples include "The Seafarer," "Homage to Sextus Propertius," "Canto I"—involves so many liberties, interpolations, and anachronisms as to transcend altogether the category of translation. Pound's appropriation and refitting of classic texts reflect the aesthetic of modernism in that fading cultural artifacts receive new life. Such poems also exemplify the ability of the symbiont to modify meaning in the host.

Both Lowell and Pound illustrate the somewhat surprising point mentioned above: unlike the long poem (Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror," for example), the lyric seldom exemplifies Bloom's idea of "poetic misprision" or misreading. The corollary to this point also bears repeating: one finds that specific instances of poetic symbiosis seem never actually to rehearse the Oedipal struggles that Bloom suggests are the norm. Even if he paid more attention to what can be learned about textual filiation from postmodernist art, in which the processes of literary creation have been laid open to the inspection of readers, Bloom has too little to say about the *individual* results of the agon he sees as universal—at least for strong poets. Bloom may be right to say that such poets misread their predecessors, but in his examples—Shelley, Stevens, Ashbery—such misprision tends to be generic rather than particular. As soon as one poem is based concretely and directly on another poem (as is not quite the case in Bloom's example of the pastoral elegy's devolution), other dynamics than misreading and Oedipal psychomachia seem paramount. In lyrics, then, guest authors tend not to misread so much as simply to engage in a diachronic exercise whereby their readers encounter, in stark terms, the differences in poetic sensibilities from one century—or even decade—to the next.

Deconstruction and Diachrony

One sees lyric symbiosis in its simplest form in the relationship between such poems as Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" or Shakespeare's sonnet 18 and Howard Moss's "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" In

the one instance the guest poet interrogates and undercuts the most famous poem of a contemporary. In the other a gap of four and a half centuries affords a twentieth-century perspective on an iconic Renaissance text. I propose to look first at the Marlowe-Raleigh symbiosis, then the more curious relationship between Shakespeare and Moss. As will be seen, to say that Raleigh replies and Moss paraphrases hardly does justice to the symbiotic subtleties of their poems. Here and elsewhere in this chapter, by the way, I shall quote in full only those poems—generally the guest texts—that are unfamiliar.

One cannot, of course, describe as unfamiliar the poem that begins "Come live with me and be my love." Written to be sung, Marlowe's verses celebrate their own musicality, their own involvement with melody, harmony, and rhythm. The shepherd paints a picture of pastoral never-never land that is temperate cousin to the splendors imagined by and promised to Faustus and other Marlovian heroes. The lyricism here, as usual with Marlowe, derives from a richness of vocabulary and imagery: "Melodyous byrds," "Madrigalls," "Beds of Roses,/And a thousand fragrant poesies," "Fayre lined slippers," "Buckles of the purest gold," and "Coral clasps and Amber studs"—not to mention dancing and singing in an endless May. Marlowe's scansion, meanwhile, palpably complements the "closes," the "division," of a musical setting. Sound and sense combine to ravishing effect in what is for this poet a thematically characteristic mode of enticement, a mode nicely suited to the pastoral convention.

But Sir Walter Raleigh's nymph knows too much to accept such blandishments:

> If all the world and loue were young,
> And truth in euery Sheepheards tongue,
> These pretty pleasures might me moue,
> To live with thee, and be thy loue.
>
> Time driues the flocks from field to fold,
> When Riuers rage, and Rocks grow cold,
> And Philomell becommeth dombe,
> The rest complaines of cares to come.
>
> The flowers doe fade, and wanton fieldes,
> To wayward winter reckoning yeeldes,
> A honny tongue, a hart of gall,
> Is fancies spring, but sorrowes fall.

Thy gownes, thy shooes, thy beds of Roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy poesies,
Soone breake, soone wither, soone forgotten:
In follie ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and Iuie buddes,
Thy Corall claspes and Amber studdes,
All these in mee no meanes can moue,
To come to thee, and be thy loue.

But could youth last, and loue still breede,
Had ioyes no date, nor age no neede,
Then these delights my minde might moue,
To liue with thee, and be thy loue.[5]

Raleigh's poem is unusual parody if it is parody at all. Certainly one hears the etymological "singing beside" that has been noted before in this study, and certainly the poem is imitated to be mocked. Parody, however, tends to be parasitic, and the vast majority of parodies have no life beyond their being from time to time trotted out to grace with the praise of imitation something of a more perfect integrity. Yet this is a parody that, under scrutiny, proves comprehensively symbiotic: it is a new work of art, substantial as a lyric can be. It derives considerable impact from the reader's knowledge of the host yet can be completely understood (given the title) without such knowledge.

The brilliance of the Raleigh poem lies not so much in iconoclasm—others, notably Shakespeare, had debunked the pastoral convention—as in the deft pinpointing of Marlowe's aporias. Like Derrida deconstructing Rousseau, Raleigh subjects Marlovian song to a rigorous analysis of unspoken premises and internal contradictions. In Derridean terms, Marlowe embraces a metaphysics of presence: his pastoral world is perfection itself, and love its triumph. Marlowe privileges not speech, like Rousseau, nor writing, like Derrida, but song and dance as the essential language of his pastoral paradise. Raleigh uncovers an economy of signification, a writing in the Derridean sense, that can never obviate *différance,* never close the gap with presence or ideality. Marlowe has omitted the iron standard that always makes honest and poignant the pastoral ideal. He declines to allow Death to inject the familiar reminder: "*Et in Arcadia, Ego.*" Thus Raleigh's nymph notes that fur-lined slippers and a wool gown seem to be needed—details that introduce into the poem ideas of seasonal harshness at odds

with the fiction of a perpetually flower-strewn, dance-enlivened, and song-filled spring. Marlowe privileges wooer over wooed and spring and pleasure over winter and death, but these hierarchies exist only in the desire of a sexual enticer or more broadly in a human preference ungrounded in the world's hard realities. Raleigh overturns them by insisting that human beings live—and waste—in time. When "Philomell becommeth dombe" in Raleigh's poem, the poet makes more specific—and more minatory—Marlowe's vague "melodious birds." There is more to the line, too, than the statement that spring and vernal birdsong pass, for Philomela was once a maid who suffered an extreme manifestation of the desire that also motivates Marlowe's lusty shepherd. The nightingale's silence equates inevitable winter with the violence—the cutting out of her tongue—that followed Philomela's sexual violation by her sister's husband, Tereus.

Where Raleigh exposes casuistry in a host text, other poets—Anthony Thwaite, for example, or Howard Moss—defer to their predecessors with a self-effacement that approaches an Oedipally motivated caution. Deferential texts such as theirs differ, however, in whether they imitate the idiom of the host or open themselves to some radically different mode of discourse. In his collection *Victorian Voices* (1980), Anthony Thwaite preserves the tonalities of his nineteenth-century speakers, notably in the five Meredithian sonnets of "A Message from Her," symbiotically attached, as the subtitle makes plain, to Sonnet V of *Modern Love*. Here the repressed returns: Mary Ellen Meredith, the woman maligned in Meredith's bitter sequence, finds a voice. But notwithstanding the admirable attempt at giving a voice to one long silenced, the poems remain pastiche, less symbiotically interesting than poems like those of Howard Moss's "Modified Sonnets," which include Shakespeare's "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" (and other poems) in a stripped-down, contemporary idiom:

> Who says you're like one of the dog days?
> You're nicer. And better.
> Even in May, the weather can be gray,
> And a summer sub-let doesn't last forever.
> Sometimes the sun's too hot;
> Sometimes it is not.
> Who can stay young forever?
> People break their necks or just drop dead!
> But you? Never!
> If there's just one condensed reader left
> Who can figure out the abridged alphabet,

After you're dead and gone,
In this poem you'll live on![6]

Like Nabokov parodying a not yet current critical practice in *Pale Fire,* Moss calls into question a reader's assumptions about anteriority and posteriority in the history of letters. One might describe Moss's poem as a reverse parody, a parody that enhances its model and makes fun of itself. It turns up beside its symbiont in classroom anthologies (I discovered it in X. J. Kennedy's *Literature: An Introduction*), where it can challenge a number of student misconceptions about poetry as it focuses their understanding of diction and voice. Like Stoppard in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead,* Moss forces the reader to contemplate the disparity between the rich melopoeia of Elizabethan diction and the almost aggressively unbeautiful accents of contemporaneity. Colloquialism, too often praised as somehow admirably honest and direct, is exposed in all its vulgarity: one is distressed to be reminded of how much, poetically, has been lost over the centuries from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II. Yet the poem is genuinely amusing (it appears in Moss's 1976 collection of light verse, *A Swim Off the Rocks*), and the more one reads it, the less comfortable one is with the idea that its conspicuous coarseness simply throws into relief the special beauty and grace of Shakespeare. One recognizes an odd integrity in this poem, whether it is taken as parodic anomaly or intertextual exemplar. For in the last analysis it has its own kind of vitality: it shows that poetry need have nothing to do with the conventionally pretty. Poetry proves to depend rather on qualities of economy, density, and wit—on its ability, even, to give expression to the otherwise ineffable. While no doubt the Shakespeare poem will never yield its special status as classic, in a way the Moss poem, like the *Quixote* of Pierre Menard, is richer than its predecessor. Shakespeare gives definitive expression to a particular type of praise, but one must credit Moss with complexly diachronic ideas about the character of poetry itself. In that he arranges for the Shakespeare poem to acquire an extra meaning—as it calls into question every premise of its twentieth-century guest—he even manages that supreme accomplishment of the symbiotic writer: to reshape meaning in a host.

A Dialogue on Creative Anxieties: Coleridge and Stevie Smith

Diachronic symbiosis is not always so polite, so self-effacing on the part of the guest poet. Among the most intriguing documents in the poetic struggle to measure up to the past are "Kubla Khan" and twentieth-century

poet Stevie Smith's symbiotic "Thoughts About the Person from Porlock." The great romantic poem is bracketed by not one but two documents: not only the apologetic note Coleridge appended to it but also the book it mentions as having contributed to his inspired dream: *Purchas His Pilgrimage*. To these intertexts one adds the Smith poem, another symbiont that derives meaning from and confers meaning on its host. Here the poet develops a revisionist view of the notorious "person from Porlock" who, according to Coleridge's note, interrupted not the composing of the poem but its transcription. Smith's iconoclasm provides an especially striking example of the way literary symbiosis calls attention to the differences in sensibility from one age to the next—an example, that is, of what I have called epistemic dialogue.

"Thoughts About the Person from Porlock" is most concretely attached to Coleridge's note, but because the note is almost undetachable from the poem (Derrida would call it a self-deconstructing example of Rousseau's "dangerous supplement"), the distinction becomes academic. The Smith poem offers one kind of meditation on the contrast between "then" (the Romantic era) and "now" (the era of irony, disenchantment, and exhaustion). It also enacts the contemporary version of the very crisis of creativity that Coleridge wrestled with:

> Coleridge received the Person from Porlock
> And ever after called him a curse,
> Then why did he hurry to let him in?
> He could have hid in the house.
>
> It was not right of Coleridge in fact it was wrong
> (But often we all do wrong)
> As the truth is I think he was already stuck
> With Kubla Khan.
>
> He was weeping and wailing: I am finished, finished,
> I shall never write another word of it,
> When along comes the Person from Porlock
> And takes the blame for it.
>
> It was not right, it was wrong,
> But often we all do wrong.
>
> * * *
>
> May we inquire the name of the Person from Porlock?
> Why, Porson, didn't you know?

He lived at the bottom of Porlock Hill
So had a long way to go,

He wasn't much in the social sense
Though his grandmother was a Warlock,
One of the Rutlandshire ones I fancy
And nothing to do with Porlock.

And he lived at the bottom of the hill as I said
And had a cat named Flo,
And had a cat named Flo.

I long for the Person from Porlock
To bring my thoughts to an end,
I am becoming impatient to see him
I think of him as a friend,

Often I look out of the window
Often I run to the gate
I think, He will come this evening,
I think it is rather late.

I am hungry to be interrupted
Forever and ever amen
O Person from Porlock come quickly
And bring my thoughts to an end.

* * *

I felicitate the people who have a Person from Porlock
To break up everything and throw it away
Because then there will be nothing to keep them
And they need not stay.

* * *

Why do they grumble so much?
He comes like a benison
They should be glad he has not forgotten them
They might have had to go on.

* * *

These thoughts are depressing I know. They are depressing,
I wish I was more cheerful, it is more pleasant,

> Also it is a duty, we should smile as well as submitting
> To the purpose of One Above who is experimenting
> With various mixtures of human character which goes best,
> All is interesting for him it is exciting, but not for us.
> There I go again, Smile, smile, and get some work to do
> Then you will be practically unconscious without positively
> having to go.[7]

"Kubla Khan" and "Thoughts About the Person from Porlock" share the theme of imaginative creation. Generations of readers, along with Coleridge himself (so he claims), have lamented the advent of the person from Porlock, but Smith affects to see the intervention as fortunate and devoutly to be wished. Reading the poem and the note skeptically, she suggests that Coleridge was in fact "already stuck" and consequently thankful for the excuse furnished by the visitor. Smith makes the person from Porlock over into an all-purpose, Godot-like symbol of the deliverer: now the writer's deliverance, now the old maid's suitor, now the death that relieves one of the burden of a meaningless life.[8] For the artist, the ability to create makes life meaningful—and both the Smith poem and the Coleridge poem concern the anxiety produced by the drying up or preemption of creative resources. But creation is sexual as well as artistic, and both poems hint at this other dimension of sterility. The sexual symbolism of "Kubla Khan" (the entire landscape is genital, orgasmic) culminates in an image of the poet as embryo, his hair *floating* in amniotic fluid (not streaming in some "co-respondent breeze"). In an image of imminent parturition, the poet expresses a wish for creative deliverance. In the Smith poem, where one senses an undercurrent of spinsterish erotic frustration, the wished-for deliverance also conflates sex and art.

"Thoughts About the Person from Porlock" changes the way one reads its host. Smith not only addresses herself to the contemporary poet's handling of the burden of the past but also meditates on the whole idea of achieving closure, achieving exemption from the endless responsibility to sustain literary continuance. The metrical vagaries of her poem serve to underscore this theme of "having to go on"—and on and on without even the bracing discipline of form. Such formal irony affords a solution to the problem of the anteriority of the past. Thus among the most effective features of Smith's poem are its deliberate banalities and repetitions of banalities—

> And had a cat named Flo,
> And had a cat named Flo.

—its ironic mimesis of a literature that has run out of things to say, abandoning an idiom in which to give expression to whatever truths might be affirmed. By such means, paradoxically, the contemporary poet produces new work—a poem immensely pleasing in its resourceful solving of a latter-day (hence more exacerbated) version of the very problem that troubled Coleridge.

Smith implies that Coleridge's tragedy may have been something other than—or in addition to—his neurasthenia, his neuralgia, and his dependence on opium: Coleridge had to deal with his own version of literary exhaustion. Yet he lived before methods of circumventing it had been imagined. The Romantic era retained and cherished—indeed, recrafted (in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*)—the idea that language could be purified, harnessed to the task of describing a preexistent reality. The language of Coleridge and his age, moreover, was a language of sincerity, with only Byron to remind readers of what irony had once (in the preceding century, for example) meant to their literature—or to hint at how central it would again be in the future. Thus what Smith does is to drive back into the past, to demonstrate as perennial, the agony of making it new again and again. She shows that it is not the exclusive affliction of contemporary artists—though they have been especially bold in embracing parody and irony as new creative avenues or means of replenishment.

Evolution of the Zeitgeist: Sidney, Wordsworth, Larkin

Like Stevie Smith's "Thoughts About the Person from Porlock" or Howard Moss's "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?," Philip Larkin's "Sad Steps" makes its symbiotic point with special clarity because of the contemporary starkness of its poetic idiom. Behind Larkin, moreover, one hears the language of not one but two hosts: Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet "With How Sad Steps, O Moon, Thou Climb'st the Skies" (#31 of *Astrophil and Stella*) and the twenty-third of Wordsworth's *Miscellaneous Sonnets,* which begins by quoting Sidney's first two lines. Actually, one could as accurately say that the Sidney sonnet is a host with two guests, but the important point here is the way each guest calls emphatic attention to its own poetic idiom. The poetic language of the Larkin poem, in fact, offers a contrast between itself and the poetic idioms—heard as a double echo—of the Renaissance and Romantic periods. Both guest authors, in their feigned impoverishment of poetic resources, would seem to exemplify Bloom's *askesis,* the deliberate renunciation, on the part of the "ephebe," of some essential aspect of the precursor. This curtailment or renunciation, how-

ever, being dictated by cultural circumstances, is not voluntary, hence not a misreading in the Bloomian sense.

The reader of Sidney's poem immediately recognizes the highly conventional utterance of a Renaissance lover:

> With how sad steps, ô Moone, thou climb'st the skies,
> How silently, and with how wanne a face,
> What, may it be that even in heav'nly place
> That busie archer his sharpe arrowes tries?
> Sure, if that long with *Love* acquainted eyes
> Can judge of *Love,* thou feel'st a Lover's case;
> I reade it in thy lookes: thy languisht grace,
> To me that feele the like, thy state descries.
> Then ev'n of fellowship, ô Moone, tell me
> Is constant *Love* deem'd there but want of wit?
> Are Beauties there as proud as here they be?
> Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
> Those Lovers scorne whom that *Love* doth possesse?
> Do they call *Vertue* there ungratefulnesse?[9]

The poem bespeaks the age that produced it in its elegant diction, its formal precision, its mythological reference, its assumptions about the relevance of poetry to lovemaking, and its conceit of looking skyward for signs that will make sense of sublunary life. It is, too, a young man's poem, written, to paraphrase another bard, in the lovely April of a cultural prime.

Wordsworth's sonnet, by contrast, transforms the scene into a simple celebration of lunar majesty:

> 'With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies,
> How silently, and with how wan a face!'
> Where art thou? Thou so often seen on high
> Running among the clouds a Wood-nymph's race!
> Unhappy Nuns, whose common breath's a sigh
> Which they would stifle, move at such a pace!
> The northern Wind, to call thee to the chase,
> Must blow to-night his bugle horn. Had I
> The power of Merlin, Goddess! this should be:
> And all the stars, fast as the clouds were riven,
> Should sally forth, to keep thee company,
> Hurrying and sparkling through the clear blue heaven;

> But, Cynthia! should to thee the palm be given,
> Queen both for beauty and for majesty.[10]

One wonders here just why Wordsworth quotes Sidney's lines—the poem scarcely requires them and turns to little thematic account the work from which they come. Wordsworth appropriates Sidney's description of an afflicted and sadly pacing moon and makes it the occasion for a nature lover's wish: that the clouds be riven and the moon be set to running among them (as the moon commonly appears to do on a night of wind and clouds). But the poet declines to complicate this scene with a love lament and so discards the rich conceit of the moon as fellow lover and fellow sufferer. The mythological references remain part of the poetic idiom, but less originally than in the Sidney poem. Although Sidney alludes conventionally to Eros, "That busy archer," he reverses the traditional mythology of the moon's gender (or at least seems to: to ask about the haughtiness of "beauties," as in line 11, implies a certain masculine camaraderie). Wordsworth, on the other hand, invokes the moon as goddess of the hunt and—by reference to the nuns—of chastity. But again, Wordsworth's sonnet is the product of its age, a standard Romantic celebration of nature. If it fails really to revise one's understanding of the Sidney poem, it nevertheless manages to express its moment in the intellectual continuum of English literature, to contrast its Romantic ethos with that of its Renaissance predecessor.

Wordsworth, too unreflective in this effort, can hardly be said to correct or debunk Sidney. He manages at best a wan and inchoate subversiveness. Though Sidney affects to see in the moon only a fellow sufferer, the reader may detect traces of astrological fatalism, for Sidney implies that human and celestial affairs are alike subject to caprice and frustration of desire. Thus he plays with the assumptions—familiar from the plays of Webster and, occasionally, Shakespeare—that celestial bodies, remote and indifferent, nevertheless shape human destiny. Wordsworth will have none of this. Affirming the awful "majesty" of the moon, he also affirms—or perhaps *assumes* would be the proper term—that humanity (the poem's speaker, himself) is a subordinate part of all that the moon represents. The moon, moreover, must not take its cue from humanity: it must not plod like dispirited nuns. Rather must the moon and more broadly nature (which never did betray the heart that loved her) be the criterion for human energy. Wordsworth's point is at least untypical of such exercises in personification and pathetic fallacy: nature (the moon) is divine and as such is to be venerated and followed. Wordsworth, nature's priest, sees as literally impious

Sidney's blithe assumption of equal status with the moon—an assumption that extends even to semiological play with that body's gender.

Both Sidney and Wordsworth must retire before Larkin's brutal wit, resolute iconoclasm, and refusal to embrace the pathetic fallacy. Only the title makes plain the connection with the Sidney original.

> Groping back to bed after a piss
> I part thick curtains, and am startled by
> The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.
>
> Four o'clock: wedge-shadowed gardens lie
> Under a cavernous, a wind-picked sky.
> There's something laughable about this,
>
> The way the moon dashes through clouds that blow
> Loosely as cannon-smoke to stand apart
> (Stone-colored light sharpening the roofs below)
>
> High and preposterous and separate—
> Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!
> O wolves of memory! Immensements! No,
>
> One shivers slightly, looking up there.
> The hardness and the brightness and the plain
> Far-reaching singleness of that wide stare
>
> Is a reminder of the strength and pain
> Of being young; that it can't come again,
> But is for others undiminished somewhere.[11]

One need not be told that this poem dates from the 1970s, nearly four centuries after Sidney's. The diction, the action, and the sentiments expressed are unmistakably those of a much later age, an age whose poetry issues not from the perfect courtier, not from "our Sidney and our perfect man," but from "the bard of the welfare state," as Larkin has been called.

Wordsworth, too, has been left behind (by nearly two hundred years), along with his stately language and assumptions about a benign and majestic nature. Thus Larkin's moon, which "dashes through clouds" as Wordsworth imagined his doing, is not majestic but "laughable" and "preposterous." The language of poetry has become ironic. The Romantic era's assumptions about nature and the language that served those assumptions are alike gone, victims of too much experience, too much knowledge. Part of that knowledge is scientific—the moon's hygienic "cleanliness" invites

no emotion, no awe. Its "stone-colored light" offers no mystery. But the knowledge is also, inevitably, the poet's knowledge of all the prior, preemptive poetry that has exhausted the very possibilities of verse. There is an odd correlation between the moon and the Larkin poem: each mocks the desire of a reader or observer to be transported in the old way, each presents itself starkly and unmysteriously. On the other hand, each has its own honesty, its own divestiture of the accoutrements of romance. No mythology attaches to either.

Larkin's poetic speaker is neither a lover nor nature's hierophant. He would seem to be a person who does not sleep well. Perhaps he has bladder trouble or drinks too much—or both. His moon is merely a painful reminder of his advancing age. Instead of a fellow sufferer at love or a chaste goddess, this is a moon of modern astronomical vacancy, its personification limited to an evocation of human idiocy ("that wide stare"). The poet strives briefly and absurdly to apostrophize this body in the manner of his predecessors ("Lozenge of love! Medallion of art!"), only to realize how empty such language and such gestures have become in an age that has seen every myth of transcendental beauty exploded. When Larkin reflects that "the strength and pain / Of being young . . . can't come again," one realizes that he refers not only to himself but to the culture that once produced a Sidney or a Wordsworth and his age. The poem gives voice, then, to that "deep, end-of-a-civilization sadness" that M. L. Rosenthal has remarked in Larkin's work.[12] One doubts that the vitality of the "others" who "somewhere" feel "strength and pain" affords the luxury of a poetic language commensurate with their merely biological youth.

The striking succession of Sidney, Wordsworth, and Larkin affords an appropriate note on which to conclude this *stretto* passage, along with the fugue—this book—that it recapitulates. Although symbiosis in the lyric, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, is not particularly prevalent, it effectively illustrates the element of self-consciousness that differentiates the subject of this study—literary reconfiguration—from its cousin, the much discussed intertextuality. The complex exchanges of meaning among Sidney, Wordsworth, and Larkin, along with the problematic relationships between Marlowe and Raleigh, Shakespeare and Moss, and Coleridge and Smith, reveal once again the inadequacy of a poetics of parasitism. Indeed, I have sought to show here that symbiosis constitutes not parasitism but an important set of inflections in the grammar of contemporary literary rejuvenation.

From *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *M. Butterfly* and *Mary Reilly,* from *Pale Fire*

and the *Crusoe* symbionts to the poems discussed in this concluding chapter, one encounters not literary vitiation but renewal. Readers, audiences, and critics seldom reproach as epigones the many artists who engage in this contemporary experiment. As they have accepted the Auden who revamps *The Tempest* as "The Sea and the Mirror," the Stoppard who turns *Hamlet* into *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead,* the John Gardner who, in *Grendel,* gives a voice to Beowulf's terrible antagonist, or the Derek Walcott who conflates the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as *Omeros,* so do they generally applaud the freshet of new examples registered in every succeeding issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* or the *New York Times Book Review:* William Palmer's appropriation, in *Leporello,* of the familiar character from *Don Giovanni;* Jane Smiley's recasting, in *A Thousand Acres,* of *King Lear;* Robert Coover's story, *Pinocchio in Venice,* of Collodi's puppet boy in old age; Lin Haire-Sargeant's account, in *H,* of the missing years in the story of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff; Peter Costello's fleshing out, in *The Life of Leopold Bloom,* of the definitive *homme moyen sensuel;* and Geoff Ryman's reimagining, in *Was,* of a Dorothy who lives in Kansas, has a dog named Toto, and suffers sexual abuse. Why such tolerance, such disinclination to dismiss this work as parasitism? Not because, on reflection, there are precedents in what Joyce does in *Ulysses* or Fielding in *Joseph Andrews,* but because in its daring, its irreverence, and its ingenuity, literary symbiosis affords a variety of fresh insights into the mechanics of artistic regeneration. Here, in other words, one sees art itself undergoing that familiar artistic operation whereby the known and unsurprising passes through defamiliarization to newness.

Such literary reconfiguration furthers the dialogue on originality that runs through the history of literature and criticism—a dialogue that, in the twentieth century (and still, now, in the twenty-first), has included those acute meditations on literary anteriority catalogued in the first chapter: Eliot on the relationship between tradition and the individual talent, Bate on the burden of the past, John Barth on the literature of exhaustion and replenishment, Bloom on the anxiety of influence, Genette on the literary palimpsest, J. Hillis Miller on the critic as host, Renato Barilli on *riscrittura*, and Christian Moraru on rewriting. In their various ways, these critics have all grappled with the illusoriness of an ideal or absolute of literary originality. Only occasionally have they recognized the erroneous premises behind terms like "burden," "exhaustion," or "anxiety"; only occasionally have they glimpsed the Joycean principle of "stolentelling," seen that literary production always involves *re*production. Their work, nevertheless, is the necessary prolegomenon to any study, the present one included, that addresses itself to the instrumentalities of literary renewal.

Originality, meanwhile, seems to have become—to paraphrase Thomas Pynchon—a remarkably scattered concept, for at this point in literary history considerable distrust has accrued around the idea of textual genesis as an event that takes place whenever a writer writes. Theorists of intertextuality have shown that writers do not produce texts; they are the media whereby texts are dismantled, reassembled, passed on. Texts always subsume prior texts, and an Ur-text is no more ultimately accessible than the signified at the end of its infinite chain of signifiers. But "since we have become so accustomed to perceiving reality through texts," remarks Michiko Kakutani, we must, in part through symbiotic repetition of stories, "try to reassess the narrative process itself. . . . [W]e must ask why we tell the stories we do, and we must ask what those stories tell us about our need to order the world."[13] Thus the writer who makes such intertextuality conscious and even comprehensive (the writer, that is, who appropriates all or part of a work by another writer) invites readers to applaud not the clumsy and impious tampering of a Frankenstein plundering the charnel house of the literary past but the gesture of an inspired Isis, reassembling the scattered Osiris and, with him, order in the creation.

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NOTES

1 Tradition, Talent, and "Stolentelling"

1 A notebook entry quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 133.

2 T. S. Eliot, "Philip Massinger," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 182.

3 Nevertheless, literary originality is an ancient concern, as Thomas McFarland shows in his discussion of the "individual/tradition problem" in "The Originality Paradox," *NLH* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 447–76.

4 Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in *Negro,* ed. Nancy Cunard (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1934), p. 43. My attention was drawn to this passage in Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 118.

5 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 424.

6 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), p. 11. My translation.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 54. Actually, the quoted phrase appears as a rhetorical question. It appears in its original form as one of my epigraphs.

8 Derrida, p. 208.

9 Patrick Scott, "A Few Still Later Words On Translating Homer (and Horace, and Tupper, and Tennyson, and St. Thomasius), or C. S. Calverley and the Victorian Parodic," *Postscript,* no. 4 (1987): 11. For more on this etymology, see Genette, p. 17.

10 Alan Wilde, *Middle Grounds: Studies in Contemporary American Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p. 53, note 3.

11 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 6.

12 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 55.

13 Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," trans. C. A. Luplow, in *Readings in Russian*

Poetics, ed. and trans. Ladislaw Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Boston: MIT Press, 1978), p. 70.

14 T. S. Eliot, "*Hamlet,*" in *Selected Essays,* p. 126.

15 Genette, for example, catalogues types of "continuation" texts: cyclical, unfaithful, murderous, series, epilogue, "generic activation," and so on. He explores "transposition," "translation," "versification," "prosification," "excision," "concision," "condensation," "digest," "extension," "expansion," "amplification," "valorization," "devalorization," and "supplement." He describes parody, burlesque, travesty, and pastiche, too, as well as several subtypes for each.

16 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 57, 58. McHale credits Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 200–66, for the term "transworld identity."

17 Judith Grossman, "What Do You Think Will Happen to Shirley?" [review of *A Natural Curiosity,* by Margaret Drabble], *New York Times Book Review,* 3 September 1989, p. 3.

18 David Leon Higdon, *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 10–11.

19 Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 99.

20 Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote,*" in *Labyrinths,* ed. and trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 39.

21 Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 105, 116–17. This kind of hand-wringing continued apace as the millennium approached. For a particularly judicious assessment of the state of things in the closing years of the twentieth century, see Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). I am indebted to Kernan for reminding me in an epigraph of Joyce's figure of "stolentelling."

22 John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," in his *The Friday Book* (New York: Putnam's, 1984), pp. 64, 69–70, 72.

23 Renato Barilli, "My 'Long Infidelity' Towards Calvino," in *Calvino Revisited,* ed. Franco Ricci (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1989), p. 13.

24 Barth, "Exhaustion," p. 72.

25 Renato Barilli, *Tra presenza e assenza* (Milan: Bompiani, 1974), pp. 252, 253. My translation.

26 Barilli, "My 'Long Infidelity,'" pp. 13–14.

27 Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment," in his *The Friday Book,* p. 203.

28 Todd Gitlin, "Hip-Deep in Post-modernism," *New York Times Book Review,* 6 November 1988, p. 36. Though Gitlin seems shortsighted on the subject of pastiche, he is quite interesting and cogent on the broader manifestations of postmodernism. See "Postmodernism: Roots and Politics," in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America,* ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 347–60.

29 McFarland, p. 457.

30 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 88.

31 Gates, p. xxiv.

32 Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1990), p. 263. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

33 A version of the problem allegedly faced by all writers constrained to express them-

selves in the language of the oppressor. For a discussion of the issues here, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature,* trans. Dana Polan, vol. 30 in the series *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

34 Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938), p. 33. The statement appears in a different form in later editions of this book, where Rosenblatt omits infinitude and speaks only of "interactions . . . between individual readers and individual literary works."

35 Barth, "Replenishment," p. 205.

36 Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 410. For more on closure and what Alan Wilde calls "open-endedness," see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Wilde, in *Horizons of Ascent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 7, 36–41, discusses the resistance to closure as a feature of the irony in modern and postmodern works.

37 Michael Riffaterre, "Criteria for Style Analysis," *Word* 15 (1959): 158. Quoted in Fish, p. 419.

38 T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays,* pp. 4, 5.

39 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford, 1973), p. 30. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

40 Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard," p. 39. The other page references in this paragraph refer to this text.

41 Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Labyrinths,* p. 201.

42 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1 (Summer 1976): 890.

43 Loy D. Martin, "Literary Invention: The Illusion of the Individual Talent," *Critical Enquiry* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 667.

44 Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e) Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). To be strictly accurate, Ulmer characterizes deconstruction as a mode of analysis, applied grammatology as a mode of writing or composition. I shall generally favor the undifferentiated term, "deconstruction," in my probings and assessments of literary symbiosis—the better to preserve the ambiguity regarding destruction and renewal.

45 Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), p. 256. Cited (and translated) in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator's preface, *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. lxxv. These lines appear in a somewhat different form in the standard English translation, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 215.

46 Spivak, p. lxxvii.

2 Tragedy and the "Post-Absurd": *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*

1 If Bloom is right, the elegist's "creative anxieties" would extend beyond the poet who is a given elegy's subject to all literary fathers who have set the standards in elegy writing. Thus (to speak only of the elegy in English poetry) one could trace the evolution of

a genre by considering how Auden misreads Arnold, who misreads Tennyson, who misreads Shelley, who misreads Gray, who misreads Milton, who feigns unreadiness ("with forced fingers rude") for elegizing to justify his own misreading of classical precedent.

2 Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe* (Leipzig, 1836), trans. John Oxenford (London: J. M. Dent, 1930), pp. 31–32. Cited in Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 5–6.

3 T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in his *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), pp. 124, 125.

4 Normand Berlin, "*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead:* Theater of Criticism," *Modern Drama* 16 (1973): 269–77. Victor L. Cahn, in *Beyond Absurdity: The Plays of Tom Stoppard* (Rutherford/Madison/Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), p. 49, suggests that "the tentative suggestions and theories" of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern constitute "a compressed, if comically confused, portrait" of what generations of critics have said about Hamlet.

5 Wlad Godzich, introduction to *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,* by Paul de Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. xxiii.

6 De Man, p. 273.

7 All quotations from *Hamlet* are from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare,* ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1961).

8 Quotations from Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* are from the revised text (New York: Grove, 1968) and are cited parenthetically.

9 The book-length treatment of this idea is Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1949). For a discussion of Oedipal features in the sonnets, see David Cowart, "Ramifications of Metaphor in Shakespeare's Sonnet 151," *Massachusetts Studies in English,* no. 2 (Fall 1975): 1–9.

10 Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Oxford, 1968), p. 43.

11 Holland, pp. 45, 110–14.

12 Tom Stoppard, "The Definite Maybe," *Author* 78 (1967): p. 19. In a later interview Stoppard claimed not to have known anything about existentialism when he wrote the play; he conceded, however, that the play could be interpreted existentially, and the interpretation of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* as "existential" has become something of a critical commonplace. I am indebted here to Richard Corballis, *Stoppard: The Mystery and the Clockwork* (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 47–48.

13 William Butler Yeats, "Lapis Lazuli," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 291–93.

14 Clive Barnes, review of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, New York Times,* 17 October 1967, p. 53. For more extensive discussions of the similarities—and contrasts—to Beckett, see Cahn, pp. 36–38; Felicia Hardison Londre, *Tom Stoppard* (New York: Ungar, 1981), pp. 36–38; and Tim Brassell, *Tom Stoppard: An Assessment* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), pp. 61–64. Gérard Genette, in *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), pp. 339–40, also touches on the Beckett connection.

15 *Tom Stoppard* (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 43. But J. Dennis Huston points out that "in the context of Stoppard's dramatic world, Shakespeare's verse may sound as archaic and artificial as the language of 'The Murder of Gonzago' sounds in *Hamlet;* instead of grandness, it may attain only to bombast." "'Misreading' *Hamlet:* Problems of Perspective in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead,*" in *Tom Stoppard: A Casebook,* ed. John Harty, III (New York: Garland, 1988), p. 56.

16 Hardin Craig, ed. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare,* p. 902.

17 Thus I disagree with Anthony Jenkins, who characterizes the action in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* as "linear" because it moves toward the deaths of the principles (*The Theatre of Tom Stoppard,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 40). In ending the play with Horatio's speech, Stoppard has refined the earlier version of the play which ended with the two ambassadors in puzzled surmise as someone beats on a wooden door and shouts "obscurely, two names." "Clearly the whole business is about to happen over again," as Corballis remarks (p. 42). Brassell reproduces this original ending in an appendix and discusses it on pp. 59–60.

18 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose,* trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 72–73, 78.

19 Sir Walter Ralegh, "On the Life of Man," *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh,* ed. Agnes M. C. Latham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 51–52.

3 Patriarchy and Its Discontents: *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

1 Arnold E. Davidson, *Jean Rhys* (New York: Ungar, 1985), p. 21.

2 Joseph Wood Krutch, preface to the 1956 edition of *The Modern Temper* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), p. xi.

3 Dennis Porter, "Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre," *Massachusetts Review* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 545.

4 Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 119.

5 Francis Wyndham, introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea,* by Jean Rhys (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 11.

6 Louis James, *Jean Rhys* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 51.

7 Anthony Luengo, "*Wide Sargasso Sea* and the Gothic Mode," *World Literature in English,* 15, no. 1 (April 1976): 229–45.

8 Michael Thorpe, "The Other Side: *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre,*" *Ariel* 8 (July 1977): 104.

9 Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 76. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

10 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 336–71.

11 See David Cowart, "Oedipal Dynamics in *Jane Eyre,*" *Literature and Psychology* 31, no. 1 (1981): 33–38.

12 For an exhaustive discussion of the entire novel as, on the one hand, a "dream-text" that "reads" the dream-text of *Jane Eyre* and, on the other, as part of a larger life-and-works text, see Nancy R. Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 127–247. Carole Angier, in *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), also contributes to our understanding of the role of dream in Antoinette's narrative. "The main modes of understanding the world and her fate to which she resorts are subconscious ones: dream, emotion and image" (p. 557).

13 Gregory H. Hallidy, "Antoinette's First Dream: The Birth-Fantasy in *Wide Sargasso Sea,*" *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 21, no. 1 (January 1991): 8–9.

14 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains the "here" as "in the garden"—"a Romance rewriting of the Narcissus topos as the place of encounter with Love." "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism,* ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 184.

15 For a discussion of the prominence of steps and stairs in Rhys's work generally, see Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys* (New York: Viking, 1985), pp. 98–99.

16 Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *NLH* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 457, 459.

17 See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), especially part A.I.2, "The Semiotic *Chora:* Regulation of the Pulsions."

18 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1 (Summer 1976): 888, 887. See also Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 25, and the discussion of women terrorists that follows.

19 I was reminded of these details in Spivak, pp. 186, 183.

20 Cixous, "Medusa," pp. 886, 888.

21 Kathy Mezei, "'And Kept Its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,*" *Critique* 28, no. 4 (1987): 199. Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), p. 155, is surely wrong in his dating of part one; he argues, for example, that Antoinette remains in the convent for five years, from 1839 to 1844.

22 Jean Rhys, *Smile Please* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979), p. 51. David Leon Higdon, who has interviewed Rhys's editor, argues that "Rhys took Bertha Mason as her historical double and perceived herself as a twentieth-century counterpart, an alien being in English society. See *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 105.

23 Anne Sexton, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," *The Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

24 Harrison notes that a critic might "make an elaborate allegory or scenario using the Lacanian scheme" (p. 268, note 26). Scharfman's "Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwartz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Telumée Miracle* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,*" *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 88–106, though only sporadically Lacanian, is a remarkably lucid feminist-psychoanalytic reading of Rhys that delivers a wonderful symbiotic paradox: though "born of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,*" *Wide Sargasso Sea* "struggles to constitute itself as the mother text of that novel" (99).

25 For the basic concepts here, see Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (originally published in French, 1966; English version published London: Tavistock, 1977), especially "The mirror stage as formation of the function of the I," pp. 1–7.

26 Brontë's inchoate feminism notwithstanding, the historical differences between her novel and Rhys's are extensive. Thus I disagree with Helen Nebeker, who asserts "that the world presented by Charlotte Brontë is the image of the twentieth-century world Rhys has . . . developed so carefully." *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage* (St. Albans, Vt.: Eden Press, 1981), p. 173.

4 Proleptic Parody: *Pale Fire*

1 David Rampton, *Vladimir Nabokov: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 163.

2 Vladimir Nabokov, trans. with commentary, *Eugene Onegin,* by Alexander Pushkin, 4 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1964).

3 Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Putnam's, 1962), p. 116. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

4 I am aware of Nabokov's objections to the term "satire." "Satire is a lesson, parody a game," he told Alfred Appel, Jr. See Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 75. Yet in Nabokov's work, Appel argues, the distinction is frequently difficult to sustain. See Appel, "*Lolita:* The Springboard of Parody," in *Nabokov: The Man and His Work,* ed. L.S. Dembo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Pres, 1967), pp. 120–21. Perhaps more to Nabokov's point would be the definitions, examples, and arguments in Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985).

5 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 6, 7.

6 Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 201.

7 Marilyn Edelstein, "*Pale Fire:* The Art of Consciousness," in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on His Life's Work,* ed. J. E. Rivers and Charles Nicol (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 218.

8 Carmela Perri, "On Alluding," *Poetics* 7 (1978): 301.

9 Meyer's *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden: Vladimir Nabokov's "Pale Fire"* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988) is a critical tour de force that reveals the wealth of linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical matter woven into Nabokov's tapestry. The discussion of the allusive weave in Alvin B. Kernan, *The Imaginary Library: An Essay on Literature and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), is also valuable. See, too, G. M. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), pp. 178–84.

10 Jeats Cohen, "So Help Me, Will," *Pucred* 1 (December 1972): 1–4. As Page Stegner points out in *Escape into Aesthetics; The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Dial, 1966), p. 125, the phrase occurs in *Hamlet* as well as *Timon of Athens.*

11 Andrew Field, *The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Crown, 1986), pp. 336, 338, 339.

12 Meyer, p. 147.

13 As Nabokov confirms in the interview with Appel in *Strong Opinions,* pp. 74–75.

14 John O. Lyons, "*Pale Fire* and the Fine Art of Annotation," in Dembo, *Nabokov,* p. 159.

15 Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 298.

16 Thus I disagree with Lucy Maddox, *Nabokov's Novels in English* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 29, who suggests that in fact Shade is committed to a naive realism of representation.

17 Laurie Clancy, *The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), p. 112, sees these remarks as out of character for Kinbote, hence a lapse in authorial control. Douglas Fowler, *Reading Nabokov* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 112–21, notes other apparent inconsistencies in the depiction of Kinbote, and argues that they vitiate Nabokov's achievement in this novel. For an eloquent counterargu-

ment, see Robert Merrill, "Nabokov and Fictional Artifice," *Modern Fiction Studies* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 456–57.

18 J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in Harold Bloom, Miller, et al, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), p. 253.

19 Mary McCarthy, "A Bolt from the Blue," *New Republic,* 4 June 1962, pp. 21–27.

20 A point also made by L. L. Lee, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p. 138.

21 My attention was drawn to this correspondence by Alter, who, however, makes a somewhat different point in *Partial Magic,* pp. 194–95.

22 Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1922; New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 223.

23 Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

24 Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood,* trans. Alan Tyson, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. 11: 100.

25 Apparently members of Nabokov's immediate family were homosexual. Note the hints in *Speak, Memory* regarding his brother Sergey and his uncle Ruta, who named Nabokov his heir.

26 A similar point is made by J. P. Shute in "Nabokov and Freud: The Play of Power," *Modern Fiction Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 643–44. Shute's essay is perhaps the most astute brief discussion of Nabokov's attitude toward Freud. For a comprehensive study, see Geoffrey Green, *Freud and Nabokov* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

27 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Putnam's, 1958), p. 169.

28 An odd detail, since Kinbote reports it *before* he has read the manuscript with its frank details. It is hardly to be wondered at, of course, if a lunatic is inconsistent.

29 For these and other parallels between Kinbote and Hazel, see Julia Bader, *The Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 36–37.

30 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci,* p. 99.

31 Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950–1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 33. To go on and try to establish the idea that one character is imagining the other, as Tanner and others have done, is to be led on a merry chase indeed. Beverly Lyon Clark notes in "An Annotated Bibliography of Nabokov Criticism," in *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov,* ed. Phyllis A. Roth (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), p. 231, that critics of *Pale Fire* have in recent years graduated from this folly. The best argument that this is the wrong question to ask is David Packman's *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), pp. 69–74. See also Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 110–11, 117–18.

32 Derrida deconstructs various texts by Rousseau in *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), especially in the chapter entitled ". . . That Dangerous Supplement . . .," pp. 141–64.

33 Derrida examines Kant's use of this term in "The Parergon," trans. Craig Owens, *October* 9 (1979): 3–40.

34 Nabokov, *Strong Opinions,* p. 66.

35 Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov,* pp. 178–79.

36 Maddox, p. 20.

37 Michael Holquist, introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination,* by Bakhtin, p. xxviii.

38 Though in this and other chapters I make use of deconstruction and other current theories, I am mindful of their tendency to reach a kind of critical mass of absurdity—or worse. Reviewing a book about the "fall" of Paul de Man, Malcolm Bradbury judiciously suggests the necessity of reigning in the wild steeds of theoretical speculation. Skepticism and restraint

> could be a necessary revolt against an ever more confident form of literary theory that emptied away far more than a transcendent signified. As writers of fiction know, the point about writing is that it *is* existentially real, an active mode of discovery through the modalities of the imagination, a reaching toward a supreme fiction. It is not a subordinate category of criticism.
>
> When writers are censored, imprisoned, killed or threatened with death for their writings, this is not because they are the disciples of undecidability. Writing is an act of expressed moral responsibility. If we are to take authors and their fate seriously, criticism must offer a portrait of creativity and of authorship as existential self-declaration. We need to honor fiction as more than a rhetorical practice, in fact as a mode of radical discovery. We need an ambiance around writing that collaborates with its nature as imaginative exploration, as idea, as dream, and that in the longer view considers creativity a prime mover in the making of intelligence, feeling and moral existence.

See "The Scholar Who Misread History" [review of *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man,*" by David Lehman], *New York Times Book Review,* 24 February 1991, p. 9.

5 Fathers and Rats: *Mary Reilly* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

1 Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 83.

2 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde The Merry Men & Other Tales* (London: J. M. Dent, 1925), p. 55. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

3 William Veeder, "Children of the Night: Stevenson and Patriarchy," in Veeder and Gordon Hirsch, eds., *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde After One Hundred Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 126. See also Edwin M. Eigner, *Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 156.

4 Elaine Showalter, "*Mary Reilly,* by Valerie Martin," *Times Literary Supplement,* 1 June 1990, p. 586.

5 For the argument that the original Stevenson text, in its account of "the estrangement of a speaker from his own voice and a writer from what he has written," represents this death, see Ronald R. Thomas, "The Strange Voices in the Strange Case: Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and the Voices of Modern Fiction," in Veeder and Hirsch, pp. 73–93.

6 See Ralph Tymms, *Doubles in Literary Psychology* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1971), pp. 93–96.

7 Irving S. Saposnick, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 91.

8 Valerie Martin, *Mary Reilly* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 259–60. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

9 William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* in *Blake Complete Writings with Variant Readings,* ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Oxford, 1972), p. 151.
10 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest,* in *Oscar Wilde,* ed. Isobel Murray (New York: Oxford, 1989), p. 503.
11 Dr. Mark Kanzler, "The Self-Analytic Literature of Robert Louis Stevenson," in George B. Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Culture* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), p. 431.
12 George S. Hellman, *The True Stevenson: A Study in Clarification* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1925), p. 129.
13 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature,* ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), pp. 193, 194.
14 John Crowley, "The Woman Who Loved Dr. Jekyll," *New York Times Book Review,* 4 February 1990, p. 7.
15 David Gates, "What the Maid Saw," *Newsweek,* 12 March 1990, p. 90.
16 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. I, *An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 69.
17 Michel Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," trans. Rupert Swyer, *Social Science Information* 10 (April 1971): 17.
18 Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," p. 19.
19 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.,* in his *Poems and Plays* (New York: Oxford, 1965), p. 261.
20 Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Dynamiter* (London: Longmans, Green, 1905), p. 307.
21 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits,* in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson,* vol. 13 (New York: Scribner's, 1925), 57–58.
22 Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner's, 1926), p. 122.
23 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Faust,* ed. R. M. S. Heffner, Helmut Rehder, and W. F. Twaddell (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1954), p. 179.
24 Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 66–67.

6 The Sexual and Cultural Other: Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and the Operatic Host

1 William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* (New York: Oxford, 1968), p. 99.
2 David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (New York: Plume, 1989), p. 95. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
3 Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 41.
4 This is one of the general premises of Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
5 Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Puccini: A Critical Guide* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), p. 148.
6 Osborne, p. 159, Ashbrook, p. 116.
7 Ashbrook, p. 117.
8 Ashbrook, p. 100.
9 Mosco Carner, *Puccini* (New York: Knopf, 1958), pp. 367–8.
10 Carner, p. 124.

11 Gabrielle Cody, "David Hwang's *M. Butterfly:* Perpetuating the Misogynist Myth," *Theater* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 25.
12 John Louis DiGaetani, "*M. Butterfly:* An Interview with David Henry Hwang," *TDR The Drama Review* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 148.
13 See "'Nothing but Darkness and Talk?': Writers' Symposium on Traditional Values and Iconoclastic Fiction," *Critique* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 264.
14 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), vol. 18: 16, 23, 36.
15 At least for the patient described in *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 17: 89–91.
16 Freud makes this point often. See, for example, the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 16: 369–71.
17 For a particular case in which Freud associates a patient's sadism with recollections of parental intercourse, see *The Interpretation of Dreams,* trans. James Strachey, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol 5: 584–85.
18 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 20.
19 In the interview with DiGaetani, Hwang is invited to agree "that Gallimard is a homosexual from day one." The playwright suggests that even if "on some level he is gay," Gallimard nevertheless "chooses to believe he is heterosexual" (p. 145).
20 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 293–94.
21 Robert Graves, introduction to *The Golden Ass,* by Apuleius (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951), p. xix. Cited in Bettelheim, p. 293.
22 Bruno Bettelheim, pp. 293–95.
23 Bettelheim, p. 226.
24 Bettelheim, p. 293.

7 Adrian & Francisco Are Gay: Auden Reading Shakespeare

1 Alan Ansen, *The Table Talk of W. H. Auden,* ed. Nicholas Jenkins (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1990), p. 58.
2 Notably Auden's literary executor, Edward Mendelson. See his introduction to W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems: New Edition,* ed. Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. xx.
3 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1961), pp. 1247–70. All quotations are from this text.
4 Frank Kermode, introduction to *The Tempest,* by William Shakespeare (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. xxiv–xxv.
5 W. H. Auden, "Balaam and His Ass," in his *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 110. In my readings of Auden's essays, I had missed this passage until I saw it cited in Richard Johnson, *Man's Place: An Essay on Auden* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 48.
6 Stephen Orgel, introduction to *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 56.
7 John Updike, "All's Well in Skyscraper National Park," in his *Hugging the Shore* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 268–69.

8 Aimé Césaire, *Une Tempête* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 24. The phrases quoted from the introductory stage directions are my translation.

9 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

10 Oscar Wilde, *The Artist As Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde,* ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 235–36.

11 Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 281.

12 Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," in *Collected Poems,* ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 197.

13 Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 21.

14 Walter Benjamin, *Angelus Novus* (Frankfurt, 1966), p. 456; quoted in Jauss, p. 196, note 68.

15 "Paysage Moralisé," *Collected Poems,* p. 105.

16 Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 12.

17 Auden, "The Sea and the Mirror," in *Collected Poems,* ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 317. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

18 Ansen, *The Table Talk of W. H. Auden,* p. 58.

19 George W. Bahlke, *The Later Auden* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp. 93–94.

20 "Music in Shakespeare," *The Dyer's Hand,* pp. 526–27.

21 "Balaam and His Ass," *The Dyer's Hand,* p. 128.

22 Orgel, Introduction to *The Tempest,* p. 55.

23 T. S. Eliot, "John Ford," in his *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), pp. 172–73.

24 "Balaam and His Ass," p. 129.

25 "Balaam and His Ass," p. 130.

26 "Balaam and His Ass," p. 132.

27 "Music in Shakespeare," p. 524.

28 Don Cameron Allen, *Image and Meaning, Metaphoric Traditions in Renaissance Poetry,* new enlarged ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 85–86.

29 *The Enchafèd Flood,* p. 22.

30 "Balaam and His Ass," p. 128.

31 "Music in Shakespeare," p. 526.

32 John Fuller, *A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), p. 160. Thomas R. Thornburg, in his monograph on "The Sea and the Mirror" as "an artistic presentation of the poet's aesthetics" (p. 1), suggests unconvincingly that Adrian and Francisco are characters who, in both Shakespeare and Auden, respond to art—Ariel's making the banquet disappear (III.iii), for example—purely as entertainment. See *Prospero, the Magician-Artist: Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror"* (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State University, 1969), p. 17.

33 *The Enchafèd Flood,* p. 16.

34 For Richard Hoggart, Auden "wastes his great skill in exhibitionism . . . in the use of the highly contrived but unsuitable sestina for Sebastian's confession." See *Auden: An Introductory Essay* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 172.

35 Harry Levin, "Two Magian Comedies: *The Tempest* and *The Alchemist*," in his *Shakespeare and the Revolution of the Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 228.

36 According to Malcolm Cowley in a letter to *Poetry* 65, no. 6 (March 1945): 345. For knowledge of this document, I am indebted to Frederick P. W. McDowell, "'The Situation of Our Time': Auden in His American Phase," in *Aspects of American Poetry: Essays Presented to Howard Mumford Jones,* ed. Richard M. Ludwig (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1962), p. 245.

37 Monroe K. Spears, *The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 220.

38 McDowell, p. 246. Edward Callan makes the telling point that since "The Sea and the Mirror" originally appeared with *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio,* it is likely that Auden intends the Shakespearean symbiont to give expression to the aesthetic and ethical levels, the oratorio to the religious level. See "Auden's Ironic Masquerade: Criticism as Morality Play," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35 (January 1966): 133. Perhaps the most lucid and subtle Kierkegaardian reading of "The Sea and the Mirror" is that of Justin Replogle, *Auden's Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 70–78, 156. For more on this crux, see the dialogue between Lucy and John McDiarmid on the one hand and Dwight Eddins on the other: McDiarmid and McDiarmid, "Artifice and Self-Consciousness in Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*," *Contemporary Literature* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 353–77; Eddins, "Quitting the Game: Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 41 (1980): 73–87; and Lucy McDiarmid, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 104. See also Herman Servotte, "Auden and Kierkegaard," in *Multiple Worlds, Multiple Words,* ed. Hena Maes, Pierre Michel, and Paulette Michel-Michot (Liège: Université de Liège, 1987), pp. 275–82. As all these critics point out, "The Sea and the Mirror" is very much the product of Auden's immersion in Kierkegaard (and Reinhold Niebuhr). At times—Gonzalo's reference to "the Absurd," Prospero's to "Sailing alone, out over seventy thousand fathoms"—Auden uses terms and phrases that come directly from Kierkegaard.

39 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death,* trans. Walter Lourie (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954), p. 178. Herbert Greenberg, apologizing for the "heavier weight of interpretation than their speeches call for," makes a similar point regarding the Master and Boatswain in *Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 130, note 11.

40 John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 72.

41 It is unclear, though, whether the two modes are original to the text or to its compositor. See Kermode, pp. xiii–xiv.

42 George T. Wright, *W. H. Auden,* rev. ed. (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p. 153.

43 F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 306. Quoted in Eliot, *The Waste Land,* in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 86.

44 Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetrie,* ed. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 38.

45 *The Table Talk of W. H. Auden,* p. 37.

46 McDiarmid, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry,* p. x.

47 Edward Mendelson, preface to *Selected Poems: New Edition* by W. H. Auden, p. xviii.

48 Auden, foreword to *The Dyer's Hand,* p. xi.

49 G. Wilson Knight, "Myth and Miracle" in his *The Crown of Life* (1947; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), p. 25. Francis Neilson has little patience with the idea of religious allegory in Shakespeare's play: "I cannot agree that there is anything in the play that smacks of Christian doctrine." See *Shakespeare and The Tempest* (Rindge, N.H.: Richard R. Smith Publisher, 1956), p. 103. Northrop Frye is also unfriendly to allegorical readings in his introduction to *The Tempest,* by William Shakespeare (Baltimore: Penguin, 1959), pp. 15–26. But allegorical interpretations of *The Tempest* have long been a staple of criticism. For a useful survey, see Kermode, pp. lxxxi and following.

50 Coppélia Kahn, "The Providential Tempest and the Shakespearean Family," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays,* ed. Kahn and Murray M. Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 236.

51 Greenberg, *Quest for the Necessary,* p. 122. Greenberg provides an especially helpful discussion of Auden's allegory, "loose, not in the sense that its symbols are contradictory or vague—they are strikingly exact—but only in its commitment to horizontal development" (pp. 125–26). See also Johnson, *Man's Place,* pp. 47–48, 53, 59.

52 For the argument that the Brontë epigraph is to be taken ironically, as a reference to the self-fashioned god of the romantic imagination, see McDiarmid, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry,* pp. 117, 160–61.

53 Gerald Nelson, *Changes of Heart: A Study of the Poetry of W. H. Auden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 27.

54 See the chart from Auden's notebook reproduced in Spears, *The Poetry of W. H. Auden,* p. 247.

55 Auden credits one Malcolm de Chazal. See "Hic et Ille" in *The Dyer's Hand,* p. 100.

56 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 157.

57 Lacan says this a number of times in a number of ways. See, for example, *Ecrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 50, 59, 234.

58 Lacan, p. 154.

59 Although Miranda speaks these lines in the Folio, most modern editors give them to Prospero.

60 Auden associates Iago and Claggart with satanic evil. See *The Enchafèd Flood,* p. 98. According to Callan, Auden's notebook for this poem, preserved in the Lockwood Library of the State University of New York at Buffalo, includes a notation equating Antonio and Iago. See "Auden's Ironic Masquerade," p. 140.

61 Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor,* ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Seats, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 75.

62 John Donne, *Divine Poems,* rev. ed., ed. Dame Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 11.

63 Auden, *Selected Poems: New Edition,* p. 88. I was reminded of these lines in Hoggart, *Auden: An Introductory Essay,* p. 173.

64 Jauss, p. 35.

8 Epistemic Dialogue: Defoe, Cozzens, Tournier, Coetzee

1 John Robert Moore explores such parallels in "*The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe,*" *Review of English Studies* 21 (January 1945): 52–56.

2 See Ian Watt, "*Robinson Crusoe* as a Myth," *Essays in Criticism* 1, no. 2 (April 1951): 95–119, especially the opening paragraphs.

3 Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).

4 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. lx.

5 See Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), vol. 3 of the 1925 edition of *Robinson Crusoe* published in London by Constable & Company, p. v. The coherence of any such allegory, though occasionally argued, has been generally doubted. See, for example, James Sutherland, *Defoe* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1938), p. 233. The most exhaustive consideration of just how much of himself Defoe invested in Crusoe is in Paula R. Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 412–30.

6 Michel Tournier, *Friday, or the Other Island,* trans. Norman Denny (London: Collins, 1969), p. 45. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

7 At the age of thirty, living in Trieste, Joyce earned money for rent by lecturing, in Italian, on Defoe and Blake. See Joyce, "Daniel Defoe," trans. Joseph Prescott, *Buffalo Studies* 1, no. 1 (1964): 24.

8 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe and Other Writings,* ed. James Sutherland (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 120. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

9 Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to The English Novel,* 2 vols. (1951; New York: Harper, 1960), vol. 1: 56–59.

10 Maximillian E. Novak, emphasizing Crusoe's frequent fear and trepidation, argues that Defoe is primarily influenced by Hobbes and other pessimistic philosophers. See *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 22–36.

11 Harvey Swados, "Afterword," in *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 315.

12 Edward Dowden, *Puritan and Anglican* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 234; slightly misquoted in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 221.

13 Karl Marx, *Capital,* trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Modern Library, 1906), pp. 88–91. Crusoe as *homo economicus* is the subject of much discussion and analysis. See Watt, especially pp. 101–19, and *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 63–74; see also Maximillian E. Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 32–66.

14 Carlos Fuentes, "The Discreet Charm of Luis Buñuel," in *The World of Luis Buñuel,* ed. Joan Mellen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 60.

15 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* p. 176. Another classic text on this subject is R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926). For a counter-Weberian argument, see George A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 185–97.

16 Angus Ross, introduction to *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1965), p. 13.

17 James Gould Cozzens, *Castaway* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives, 1934), p. 95. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

18 Frederick Bracher, *The Novels of James Gould Cozzens* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), p. 43.

19 William Cowper, *Cowper: Verse and Letters,* ed. Brian Spiller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 140.

20 Richard Ellmann, "The American Aristocracy of James Gould Cozzens," *The Reporter,* 3 October 1957, p. 42.

21 Alastair Fowler, in an especially interesting psychoanalytic discussion of this novel, reads it as the symbolic account of the development of the individual and the species. "Lecky's ascent into the store is an ascent of the species, a rehearsal of the development of the race as well as of his own personal development from a child in the basement to an 'armed man' (Title of Sect. 2) with the run of the building." See "Isolation and Its Discontents," *Twentieth Century Literature* 6, no. 2 (July 1960): 53. Fowler is also good on the contemporaneous political and social resonances in the story and on the store as symbol of capitalist society.

22 Stanley Edgar Hyman, "My Favorite Forgotten Book," *Tomorrow* 7 (May 1947): 58.

23 Sir Thomas Gray, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray,* ed. H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 10.

24 Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne,* trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 177.

25 For a discussion of this theme, especially as it represents a departure from Cozzens's more characteristic emphasis on social context, see Harry John Mooney, *James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of Intellect* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1963), pp. 17–26.

26 Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), pp. 561–62, 567, 583–84.

27 According to Matthew J. Bruccoli, Cozzens began his novel in the fall of 1930. See *James Gould Cozzens: A Life Apart* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), pp. 106–7.

28 William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 105, 93.

29 Bruccoli, p. 122.

30 D. G. Bevan, *Michel Tournier* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986), p. 27. My translation.

31 I was reminded of this by David Price.

32 Lytton Strachey, *Landmarks in French Literature* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), p. 194.

33 Watt, pp. 97–103.

34 Anthony Purdy, "From Defoe's *Crusoe* to Tournier's *Vendredi:* The Metamorphosis of Myth," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 11, no. 2 (June 1984): 222. For the argument regarding the overall shapeliness of *Robinson Crusoe* in its entirety, see E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp. 31–50.

35 Claude Brahimi, "*Une enivrante expérience de la liberté,*" *Magazine littéraire,* no. 138 (June 1978): 15.

36 Like John Barth, Tournier is fascinated by twins. He conceives of his Crusoe as at once the twin of Friday and the twin of Defoe's castaway. Of twins Tournier remarks, "One might say that all other human couples—man-woman, mother-child, father-daughter, brother-sister, etc—are clumsy approximations of this unsurpassable model." See J. J. Brochier, "*Dix-huit questions à Michel Tournier,*" *Magazine littéraire,* no. 138 (June 1978): 13. My translation.

37 Michel Tournier, *Le Vent paraclet* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 223. My translation.

38 J. M. Coetzee, "Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and the Primacy of Art," *UCT Studies in English* 5 (1974).

39 Robert M. Post, "The Noise of Freedom: J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," *Critique* 30, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 145. One rationale for this kind of reading is the assumption that Coetzee had to avoid commination (or worse) by the South African authorities. But as Coetzee himself remarks in "André Brink and the Censor," *Research in African Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 59–74, the 1980s saw the decline of censorship in South Africa. Maureen Nicholson, in "'If I make the air around him thick with words': J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," *West Coast Review* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1987), is representative of critics who want their Coetzee more explicitly engagé. She argues that the novel is a metafictional retreat from Coetzee's usual rendering of "a politicized reality" (58), and she reproaches the author for "a laboriously articulated narrative marred by incessant contrivance and good intentions" (53). More subtle is Michael Marais, who in "Interpretive Authoritarianism: Reading/Colonizing Coetzee's *Foe*," *English in Africa* 16, no. 1 (May 1989), suggests that, "despite the fact that *Foe* is not 'engaged' on the level of overt political content, . . . its metafictional form politicizes the reading process" (15). But ultimately I vote with Paul Williams, who in "'Foe': The Story of Silence," *English Studies in Africa* 31, no. 1 (1988), argues that Coetzee in this novel "is not giving the reader a clever allegory or analogy of 'the South African situation' or even an obliquely distorted representation of South African 'reality.' . . . The text . . . has as its major concern . . . the unbridgeable gap between text and world" (33–34).

40 Nina Auerbach, "A Novel of Her Own," *New Republic*, 9 March 1987, p. 37.

41 Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), p. 36.

42 J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 82. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

43 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author," trans. Josué Harari, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 142.

44 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 209, 216–17, 218.

45 Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), p. 153.

46 Dick Penner, "J. M. Coetzee's *Foe:* The Muse, the Absurd, and the Colonial Dilemma," *World Literature Written in English* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 213.

47 Kathryn M. Wagner, "'Dichter' and 'Dichtung': Susan Barton and the 'Truth' of Autobiography," *English Studies in Africa* 32, no. 1 (1989): 11.

48 Adrienne Rich, *Poems: Selected and New 1950–1974* (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 196, 197.

49 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol 5: 111, note 525.

50 Erik Homburger Erikson, "The Dream Specimen of Psychoanalysis," in *Psychoanalytic Psychiatry and Psychology, Clinical and Theoretical Papers*, vol. 1, ed. Robert P. Knight and Cyrus R. Friedman (New York: International Universities Press, 1954), pp. 147, 159–60, 165. See also Erikson, *Identity Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), pp. 197–204.

51 Eve Tavor Bannet, *Structuralism and the Logic of Dissent: Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 26.

52 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton,

1988), p. 160; cited in Bannet (who translates the second phrase more elegantly as "the search for signification itself"), p. 29.

53 Bannet, p. 40.

9 Ancients and Moderns and Postmoderns: *Beowulf* and *Grendel*

1 Marijane Osborn and Janice Hawes, "Afterword: Amlæd (Hamlet)," *ANQ* 20, no. 3 (2007): 77. I am indebted to my colleague, Scott Gwara, for this source.

2 Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," in *The Artist As Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 308.

3 Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 9.

4 John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 82.

5 Joe David Bellamy and Pat Ensworth, "John Gardner," in *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers*, ed. Bellamy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 179.

6 Susan Strehle, "John Gardner's Novels: Affirmation and the Alien," *Critique* 18, no. 2 (1976): 94.

7 John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 6, 8, 11, 5. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

8 Jonathan Swift, *A Full and True Account of the Battle Fought Last Friday, Between the Ancient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library*. In *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 368.

9 Helen B. Ellis and Warren U. Ober, "*Grendel* and Blake: The Contraries of Existence," in *John Gardner: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Robert A. Morace and Kathryn VanSpanckeren (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 53.

10 Grendel's failure to make any such discovery leads Michael Ackland to a nihilistic reading of the novel, but surely the nihilism is that of an impercipient and supremely unreliable narrator, not Gardner. See "Blakean Sources in John Gardner's *Grendel*," *Critique* 23, no. 1 (1981): 57–66.

11 Stephen Singular, "The Sound and Fury Over Fiction," *New York Times Magazine*, 8 July 1979, p. 34.

12 Marshall L. Harvey, "Where Philosophy and Fiction Meet: An Interview with John Gardner," *Chicago Review* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1978): 75.

13 Bellamy and Ensworth, p. 173

14 Craig J. Stromme, "The Twelve Chapters of *Grendel*," *Critique* 20, no. 1 (1978): 83–92.

15 John Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), pp. 83–84.

16 See Christopher Butler, "Numerological Thought," in *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis*, ed. Alistair Fowler (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), p. 20.

17 Though its meaning as life symbol antedates Christianity, the fish—ΙΧΘΥΣ or ICHTHYS in Greek—lends itself to acronymic meaning, the letters spelling Iesous Christos Theou Ouios Soter (Ιησους Χριστος Θεου Υιος Σωτηρ) or "Jesus Christ of God the Son, Savior."

18 William Michael Rossetti, ed., *The Poetical Works of William Blake, Lyrical and Miscellaneous* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), p. 184n.

19 Sir James George Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodor Gaster (New York: Criterion Books, 1959), pp. 606–9.
20 Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9, part 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 255.
21 Jung, p. 266.
22 Harvey, p. 82.
23 Quoted in Singular, p. 15.
24 Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*, p. 126.
25 *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1961), p. 1293.
26 For the argument that both *Grendel* and *Beowulf* "present a dichotomy which binds Grendel and Unferth on one hand and Beowulf and the poet/Shaper on the other," see Norma L. Hutman, "Even Monsters Have Mothers: A Study of *Beowulf* and John Gardner's *Grendel*," *Mosaic* 9 (Fall 1975): 22–23.

10 *Stretto* Conclusion: The Lyric Symbiont

1 Thomas Pynchon, "Entropy," *Slow Learner* (New York: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 83.
2 Sextus Propertius, "The Revenant," in *The Poems of Propertius*, trans. Ronald Musker (London: J. M. Dent, 1972), pp. 184–86.
3 Robert Lowell, "The Ghost," in *Lord Weary's Castle and The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (New York: Harvest, 1972), pp. 56–58.
4 Ezra Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," in *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1926), p. 216.
5 Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh*, ed. Agnes M. C. Latham (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1951), pp. 16–17.
6 Howard Moss, *A Swim Off the Rocks* (New York: Antheneum, 1976).
7 Stevie Smith, *Collected Poems*, ed. James MacGibbon (New York: New Directions, 1983), pp. 385–86.
8 "Many of her best poems cry for restful death," says Christopher Ricks. See "Stevie Smith: The Art of Sinking in Poetry," in *In Search of Stevie Smith*, ed. Sanford Sternlicht (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. 198. Sternlicht, in *Stevie Smith* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), p. 78, interprets the person from Porlock as "distraction, company, even death: anything to alleviate depression."
9 Sir Philip Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William Ringler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 180.
10 William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1904, 1936).
11 Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989), p. 169.
12 M. L. Rosenthal, *The Modern Poets: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 223.
13 Michiko Kakutani, "And What Happened Next? Read the Sequel," *New York Times*, 5 June 1992, sec. B, p. 2.

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